NEO-COLONIAL SYSTEMS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POSTCOLONIAL VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN THE UNITED STATES

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In Partial Fulfillment

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by

Nancy Sagona

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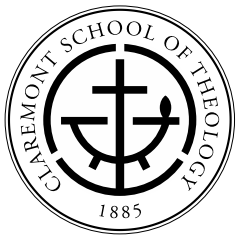

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has been presented to and accepted by

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Abstract

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Colonialism remains a contentious force within global power systems, perpetuating violence and oppression against women, minorities, and the earth. Postcolonial theory primarily looks at the power dynamics and cultural representation of formerly colonized people. This dissertation investigates the utility of postcolonial theory as a tool for analyzing how white women in the United States experience postcolonial violence and trauma. Using autoethnography as a method, my research will show how violence against white-identifying women is attributed to ongoing colonial structures which uphold and extend colonialism in novel ways domestically, religiously, economically and politically. By examining the intersections between race, class, and gender, my research can better identify the utility and limitations of using postcolonial theory as a tool for analyzing, not universalizing the experiences of women of color. Additionally, these intersections allow me to address white complicity and privilege, offering a model of resistance through an ecofeminist contemplative praxis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of Postcolonial Theory

After World War II, the United States emerged as a dominant global power, surpassing weakening nations, namely Britain, which could no longer maintain its colonial status (Young 2016, 44). However, this development did not mark the end of imperialism; rather, it ushered in a neocolonial stage where the United States gained power after Europe's influence declined (26-27, 44-45). Once tricontinental countries reached independence, they could not extricate themselves from the political, economic, and cultural frameworks imposed on them by the colonizers. These nations faced structural dominance due to the superpower's technological advancements, unlimited access to capital, favorable trade agreements, and strong military prowess (44-46).

The "post" in *postcolonial* originally referred to the period after the end of direct colonial rule (Young 2016, 44). However, it is not "post" in the second sense which describes the general framework of power that has been constructed to function out of postcolonial struggle and dependence (44-45). A renewed form of colonialism emerged through Western dominance, sustained by global expansion of capital, strong military influence, and the continued dominance of Western hegemonic structures. Historically, the devastating impacts of colonialism left colonized populations to confront the atrocities of colonial violence that justified countless deaths, slavery, and the displacement of millions through land appropriations. Many cultures of people were not only dismantled but were destroyed and their histories were erased (4).

Postcolonial theory emerged from these historical realities to establish an academic framework to better understand the implications of colonialism and its effects on formerly colonized populations. It critically examines the political, cultural, and economic influences of

colonial powers on subjugated populations in hopes of helping these communities heal from postcolonial violence and to reclaim their histories and identities.

Feminist Theory and the Postcolonial

Although white women were complicit and benefited from European occupation and domination, they were still oppressed by gender, experiencing many forms of patriarchal violence. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner (1986, 239) defines patriarchy as a "manifestation and institutionalization" of male dominance over the family, specifically children and women, and she argues that it emerges into larger societal units in which men use their power to their own advantage especially where women are concerned. Lerner points out that patriarchy does not imply women have no power or rights at all; however, she does argue that patriarchy shifts and turns into different forms of dominance subject to different societal and historical situations (239). Lerner's well established chronological account of events beginning in Ancient Mesopotamia provides historical evidence from artifacts and early narratives that reveal that male dominance was well established in ancient civilizations, long before the Bible was written and long before European colonialism (239-41). Postcolonial theory presupposes patriarchy historically. It is not only built off already embedded patriarchal foundations, but it constructs and reproduces new patriarchal norms using gender to reify male power and superiority (McClintock 1995, 49–74).

The early women's rights movement of the nineteenth-century was all about equality for women. This laid the groundwork for the emergence of second-wave feminism, which tackled various issues such as heterosexuality, racism, and family and workplace dynamics while still advocating for equal rights (Mishra, 2020). This liberation movement led mainly by white Western women became a critical theme in postcolonial contexts as a response to fundamentalist

views in religion that held onto ideologies that universally subjugated women (Young 2016, 380-381). Nonetheless, colonized women remained marginalized within second-wave feminist movements because the focus remained on issues that pertained to white-identifying women in the United States and their own needs, overlooking the needs and individual experience of colonized women (380-81).

Hence, a third-wave feminist movement arose that was significantly shaped by women of color who critiqued white feminism. They also advocated for intersectionality, which is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw that showed the relationships and specific distinctions between race, gender, and class and other identities and social locations (Cho et al. 2013, 787, 804). The third-wave feminist movement also positioned women of color to challenge the notion of a homogeneous female experience, which universalized earlier feminist and postcolonial thoughts. This movement critically challenged binary normatives, queer theory, and gender fluidity along with other concerns of oppression from women in the global South.

Postcolonial feminism emerged alongside the third-wave feminist movement because it was very concerned with national and cultural identity *outside* of Western feminist thought. Postcolonial feminist theory diverged sharply from white Western feminists, rejecting the universalizing of all women's experiences and the imperialistic assumptions that women in the global South needed to be "saved by well-meaning white, Eurocentric bourgeois men and feminist women" (Young 2016, 377). For example, white feminists mistakenly interpreted certain cultural practices of women in the South, such as wearing head coverings, as signs of oppression. Therefore, postcolonial feminism is concerned with a decolonial discourse to assure the preservation of cultural practices that are expressions of ongoing resistance to neo-

colonialism integral to maintaining the cultural and religious identities of women, emphasizing the difference of race, gender, class, and location of all women (377).

Problem Statement

Postcolonial studies traditionally focus on the experiences of colonized peoples but has not often examined the colonial violence and trauma experienced by heterosexual, white-identifying women born and living in the United States. Even though the United States occupies a fraught position in postcolonial studies due to its history as both a settler-colonial state and an imperial power, colonial systems of dominance continue to operate globally, causing violence and trauma to be marginalized peoples, including white-identifying women.

One challenge in undertaking this analysis is that postcolonial theory historically centers on colonized people of color, intentionally moving away from whiteness, particularly when whiteness is associated with colonial complicity and privilege. This study therefore engages a theoretical postcolonial framework that was not academically developed to study the positionality of white-identifying women in the United States. Imperatively, these dominant systems also historically structured gendered, racial, and economic hierarchies within colonizing societies themselves. Therefore, this dissertation addresses the gap in postcolonial scholarship by examining how colonial systems of power continue to produce trauma and violence within the imperial center, specifically in the lives of white-identifying women in the United States. By naming and exposing these forms of violence, the study utilizes postcolonial theory as a mode of resistance and develops a model for solidarity, transformation, and healing through an ecofeminist contemplative praxis that can foster community among those who have experienced postcolonial violence and trauma. This is important because the foundational work of Franz Fanon in postcolonial theory warns that lingering manifestations of trauma and suffering will

persist without the decolonization of Western hegemonic structures globally. (Fanon 2004, viii, 2-3, 238-39).

This insight raises an important postcolonial question for white-identifying women in the United States: how does the lingering violence of colonial systems continue to replicate itself within everyday social institutions? In this project, I am using postcolonial theory to help identify and understand the interlocking systems of colonialism, starting with the violence and trauma I personally experienced. My reflection took me to the intimate spaces of the home, workplace, courtroom, healthcare, church, and my mind.

In the blazing summer heat in 2010, I stood outside in a long line at the welfare office in Brownsville, Texas. I was there to get food stamps and cash aid to provide for my children. There was not a shade tree or chair in sight to lighten my load. I saw my own reflection refracting off the blistering pavement. I did not recognize who I was. The person I had built myself up to be all my life, just vanished out of thin air. It was on this day that I realized I was standing among some of the most oppressed and forgotten people in the world. With brutal clarity, I realized how the system and unjust social structures fail people, how our religious communities fail people.

After twenty-five years of demonstrating strong work ethics and succeeding in a male dominated industry, it took six men and an administrative hearing judge fifteen minutes to destroy my life's work and my life as I knew it. I went from riches to rags literally overnight. Revered and respected, then condemned. Guilty! I was alienated, blackballed, invisible, and financially ruined. I disappeared alive. My quest for answers deepened and my desire to serve those who have been victims of circumstance and injustice led to my research work. Despite many attempts to make sense of my loss of identity, I could not pinpoint or justify what exactly

had occurred. I was unable to name the violent and traumatic experience or what it was attributed to. I could not define my experience.

As I journeyed through this "paschal mystery," trying to make sense of all the traumatic injury, I realized the problem was deeply embedded in societal structures of power and corruption. After over a decade of research, I was drawn to the critical insights offered by feminist and theological thought. These discourses provided me with the language and tools I needed to examine the forces of systemic power that I questioned even throughout my childhood. These tools helped me understand how my own worldviews thought about oppression, violence, abuse, patriarchy, and imperial theology.

What began as an effort to understand my own displacement and silencing in the world, my interest evolved into a broader scholarly inquiry into how power, identity, and resistance are negotiated within these overlapping fields of thought. Years later, I was introduced to the word "*postcolonial*," which analyzes how colonization shaped understandings of race, gender, class, and sexuality that resulted in oppression and violence, as well as erasing colonized peoples' histories and identities. And yet, despite the colonizing systems' best efforts, the people and their histories couldn't be fully erased.

I still remember all the nameless faces who stood in line with me that hot summer day waiting until *their* number was called. I can still hear *their* stories and *their* cries for help. This moment of crisis forced me to confront how institutional power shapes lived experiences through social hierarchies, gender, race, and class which is often completely invisible until one is pushed outside the boundaries of social belonging. Research shows that women acknowledge, either consciously or unconsciously, the influence of patriarchy on societal, political, and religious

norms. However, the impact and interpretation of patriarchy vary considerably among different cultural groups and contexts.

Since postcolonial theory addresses this problem by examining how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and interpreted, one of the challenges explored in this dissertation is that *postcolonialism* is often disregarded as an historical artifact rather than an ongoing system shaping contemporary contexts, social relations, and institutions. Because postcolonial studies originated mainly as an academic field, many people outside of intellectual settings are familiar with its insights. Additionally, because the field's primary emphasis centers on colonized people of color, many white-identifying women in the United States, including those within academia, do not always seek out postcolonial theory as a framework for interpreting their own experiences. As a result, they fail to recognize how colonial systems continue to operate withing their cultural contexts in their everyday lives. More importantly, they fail to see how postcolonial violence persists today and is particularly violent and oppressive for all women globally.

Drawing on this theoretical framework, Homi K. Bhabha argues that knowledge is not produced solely through abstract intellectual discourse but also through the lived experiences of individuals who can articulate their own perspectives without dominant, hegemonic narratives. For Bhabha (2004, 44–45), recognizing the "knowledge of cultural and gendered difference" destabilizes dominant representations that rely on fixed stereotypes or imagined constructions of the Other.

Imperialism and colonialism in the United States today is hidden because white people in the United States are unlikely to recognize their nation as an empire or settler-colonial state: the continued effects of its imperialism and colonialism are often passed off as psychopathy, politics, or a social or religious problem. White women, consciously or unconsciously, navigate between

both privilege and oppression within historical and ongoing postcolonial and hierarchical settings contributing to these violent systems that affect all other cultures and minorities including the earth and all creation. This project builds on the work of postcolonial scholarship to aid in the postcolonial vision of countering hegemonic narratives that define women, and in particular white-identifying women, as a static and homogenized identity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the hidden oppressive structures that sustain postcolonial systems and show how these systems produce trauma and violence in the lives of white-identifying women in the United States. Being both the subject and the researcher in the autoethnographic approach, I will show the ways that I personally have been shaped by global systems of power that reflect colonial legacies, even in the context where my own racial privilege and complicity is held. Understanding the ways society, religion, politics, and economic systems root themselves in colonial systems can provide new insights that go beyond a single-culture focus, contributing to a truly global postcolonial discourse on the effects of neo-colonial violence.

This dissertation argues that postcolonial theory names violence and trauma. It exposes structures and systems of violence while offering a site for resistance whereby I offer a model of resistance through an ecofeminist contemplative praxis which can lead to spiritual healing that goes beyond one race, religion, culture, or location.

Research Questions

1. How do heterosexual, white-identifying women experience postcolonial trauma and violence in the United States today?

2. In what ways are heterosexual, white-identifying women in the United States affected by postcolonial systems of oppression psychologically, domestically, economically, politically, religiously, and ecologically?

3. How can a contemplative ecofeminist praxis, grounded in lived experience, function as a form of practical theology that enables spiritual resistance, healing, and solidarity in response to postcolonial and patriarchal violence?

Research Sub-Questions:

1. In what ways does postcolonial violence continue to manifest and sustain itself as a global system of dominance?

2. How do postcolonial power structures shape and sustain the domination of white-identifying women within domestic, political, economic, religious, and social contexts in the United States.?

3. How does postcolonial violence and trauma differently impact women across race, class, gender, religion, and cultural lines today? How can engaging in a contemplative ecofeminist practice explore the lived experiences of all women by constructing a practical model of the theology for spiritual resistance, healing, and solidarity?

4. How can an ecofeminist theological perspective show how Christianity perpetuates these systems of violence by upholding violent and oppressive neo-colonial structures including a gendered God?

Postcolonial theory, based on the writings of five major voices in the field, provides me with an analytical framework upon which I will build my project. Using autoethnography as my methodology involves constructing a thematic understanding of postcolonial violence and trauma as it pertains to my own lived experiences as a white-identifying woman today in the United

States. Using postcolonial theory can help to identify the convergences, tensions, and the gaps in postcolonial literature that intersect with ecofeminism to reveal the hidden ways violence and trauma to women and the earth is sustained by systemic power systems that operate on a global scale today. I argue that an ecofeminist praxis can lead to a pathway for spiritual healing that is not limited by sex, gender, culture, or race.

Scope of the Study

Using arguments from postcolonial theory can help me examine how race, gender, class, and global power dynamics intersect with oppression without universalizing the experience of white women with the experiences of women of color (Beattie 2024, 21). Therefore, the scope of this dissertation can move toward postcolonial methodologies through an ecofeminist lens that give precedence to the agency and knowledge of non-European women while avoiding a reproduction of colonial hierarchies.

This can be achieved by negotiating a balanced solidarity that acknowledges the differences among all women and by acknowledging the complicity and privilege of the white Western subject. The methodology for this research is autoethnography, which involves being both the researcher and the subject of my research and analysis. I would like to trace terrains in scholarship that analyze intersections of race and culture so it can include the varied ways patriarchy affects women across racial and social lines. My intention is to explore the nuances of trauma that develop in early childhood experiences of patriarchy and postcolonial violence. Then, I will examine the greater aspects of that manifest into complex adult generational and psychological trauma. To conclude, I will draw from an eco-feminist theological praxis as a response to healing, survival, and being in community with all creation.

Definitions of Key Terms

Whiteness: I will define and frame the term *whiteness* in this dissertation as a racial construct by colonial white European men that presupposes a racial superiority and normative.

What *whiteness* means in this research: According to Terese Jonsson, in her book *Innocent Subjects: Feminism and Whiteness*, the term *whiteness* refers to a naturally assumed superiority, including physical and structural dominance of white individuals in both Western and global contexts. In postcolonial and sociological studies, whiteness has been constructed, and this definition establishes that whiteness is a category created to center white people as a normative standard (Jonsson 2021, 2).

Jonsson (2021, 2) also stresses that this force of white dominance in academic and feminist circles does not lead to positive conversations with white feminist women who seek to engage with a multiracial audience. Therefore, it is critical that I assert that, although I am a white-identifying female in the United States of America doing a postcolonial feminist research project, it is urgent to convey that I reject the colonial construct of race that situates white-skinned European people as superior and the normative standard. I acknowledge my complicity and privilege as a white woman. Further, I will speak out of my own personal experience with trauma and violence even as I hold privilege being a white woman from the United States. However, using the term *whiteness*, or that I identify as a white woman in the United States, also denotes how I can deconstruct the myth of race and white superiority in my research. Additionally, I can demonstrate that white women are never *only* white women. White women are as intersectional as all other women in the world, including colonized women of color and any other woman who does not fit into any patriarchal, epistemic, or colonial systems of classification.

Postcolonial: I will begin by providing a better understanding and working definition of the terms *postcolonial* and *Post-Colonial*, which denote different meanings depending on the specific context.

Post-Colonial: Hyphenated and capitalized, the term usually refers to history and the chronological period of time that colonial rule officially ended. It attempts to convey the idea that colonialism was beneficial to colonized societies and that the devastating impacts of colonialism just vanished. Its meaning is based on historical accounts which have been influenced by Western European epistemologies rather than from the true experiences and voices of the colonized peoples and cultures (Young 2016, 57-58).

The term *postcolonial*, uncapitalized, and unhyphenated, signifies a theoretical framework, usually in academic settings, that analyzes the continuing influences of colonialism and imperialism in social, cultural, economic, and political contexts that require critique of the systems that are impacted by colonization (Young 2016, 57-58). Accordingly, this study employs *postcolonial* consistently to analyze ongoing systems of power, violence, and trauma, rather than to denote a completed historical transition.

Patriarchy: "The wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. it implies that mental power and all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to high power. It does not imply that women are totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources" (Lerna 1986, 239).

The term *developmental violence* refers to exposure to chronic child abuse and neglect that leads to developmental problems which affect emotional development (van der Kolk 2005).

Thesis and Argument

Postcolonial theory has played a pivotal role in scholarship revealing the hidden ways colonial structures were established and sustained epistemologically, psychologically, culturally, politically, religiously, economically, and environmentally. Postcolonial studies concentrate on dismantling constructed Western narratives of colonized peoples by debunking myths surrounding race, gender, equality, and culture. However, the lack of scholarship for white-identifying women in the United States motivates me to uncover hidden neocolonial and patriarchal structures that may continue to shape the experiences of women today, underscoring the urgent need to broaden or translate the concepts of postcolonial theory into knowledge that nonacademic women can understand and employ. By conducting an in-depth analysis of my specific experiences as a white-identifying woman in contemporary times, this study aims to shed new light on how post-colonial structures perpetuate systems of violence and trauma in novel ways to all women and the earth. Neo-colonialism and patriarchy are interconnected systems that continue to inflict exploitation and trauma not only to all women, but the planet. The forged and lost identities and histories of white-identifying women who endure postcolonial violence and trauma inadvertently perpetuate and sustain postcolonial and patriarchal systems, fundamentally moving the neo-colonial power forward globally.

Argument 1: Postcolonial systems produce gendered violence against white-identifying women by reinforcing domination, silencing, and epistemic erasure.

Argument 2: White-identifying women in the United States are structurally oppressed through economic, domestic, and political systems that replicate colonial patterns of unequal labor, control, and access to resources.

Argument 3: Postcolonial trauma manifests through ecofeminist violence that connects harm to women and harm to the Earth, spiritually, psychologically, and materially.

Argument 4: Ecofeminism can critique post-colonial systems that exploit both women and nature and show how patriarchy and an imperial view of God within Christian theology perpetuates colonial ideologies by reinforcing gendered hierarchies which subjugates women and earth.

Argument 5. A contemplative ecofeminist praxis, grounded in lived experience, functions as a form of practical theology that moves toward a sacred resistance and communal healing in response to postcolonial and patriarchal violence.

Significance and Limitations

The significance of this dissertation is to name structural, postcolonial violence which is integral for healing and resistance. My personal narrative (chapter 4) functions as *data* for analyzing systemic postcolonial violence; it is not a spiritual testimony. The findings (chapter 5) will reveal that postcolonial and patriarchal systems manifest in the United States through religious institutions, familial and domestic domains, in legal and justice systems, politics, economics, and on multiple social platforms. Postcolonial theory serves as the primary framework that names epistemic violence as it continues to operate through neo-colonial systems. Healing is thus a discursive epistemic healing which opens the space for resistance.

It is also significant to construct a practical ecofeminist and contemplative model for survivors of postcolonial violence and trauma that can help them recollect their histories, memories, and embodied experiences. In my final chapter, I explicitly shift from epistemic healing (chapter 5) to embodied, communal healing through contemplation and relational

restoration (chapter 6). The theology enters *here* as praxis, not as autobiography. This movement from naming violence to embodying healing reflects the central contribution of this dissertation.

In this dissertation, I reveal how my personal lived experiences of trauma and violence connect to the postcolonial, patriarchal, and hierarchical systems that persist today, often hidden in plain sight. It also seeks to help theologians recognize how their own encounters with postcolonial violence manifest in contemporary society across diverse cultures, races, and epistemic contexts.

One limitation I immediately see in this research is that I have not been able to include a broader comparative study regarding the intersections of privileged and marginalized groups as I conduct this cross-cultural analysis of oppression. This leaves potential gaps in my understanding due to my own cultural and racial positioning, being a white, disadvantaged woman. I also see my method of autoethnography could be a potential limitation for readers who may still have concerns about generalizations and bias on my part since I am both the primary subject and the researcher of the project.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter Overview

Postcolonialism exists in today's world, still governed by neo-imperialist structures. Colonialism facilitated the transmission of knowledge through the edification, translation, and interpretation of language, thereby reinforcing an androcentric bias globally (Bhabha 2004, 30–33). This has contributed to widespread racial and cultural violence to women and other minority groups. These systems maintain and adapt postcolonial violence and trauma for white women despite their historical and current links to the postcolonial problem. In her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock (1995, 6-7, 304-5) argues that while white women were historically positioned as subordinate to white men during the colonial period, they nonetheless participated in and profited from systems of imperial power.

Neo-colonialism and patriarchy are interlinked systems that continue to exploit women across various demographics, including race, gender, religion, and class. Through autoethnography, I have explored my own lived experiences, identifying and articulating the ways society positions these oppressive and violent systems, offering resistance to postcolonial scholarship by examining broader cultural issues that affect all women in the global world today. Additionally, I have conducted a critical analysis of my own role in resisting but also perpetuating and sustaining colonial systems through the use of white privilege and complicity. This method allows me to reflect deeply on my personal experiences and interactions, examining how they may reinforce or challenge existing power structures.

Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Since whiteness, complicity, and privilege must be treated as ethical considerations in

this research, autoethnography allows me to critically reflect on how I may consciously or unconsciously sustain postcolonial systems that continue to dominate women. This method demands individual responsibility but also justifies the broadening of postcolonial theory to include the experiences of white Western women. By examining the ongoing complicity of white women in sustaining hegemonic structures dominated by white men, this study highlights how white women can function within postcolonial systems as both subjects of patriarchal violence and as agents upholding those very systems. Acknowledging this dual role is necessary to understanding how postcolonial strategies operate today and why it is necessary to incorporate white identifying women in the United States' experiences into postcolonial analysis (McClintock 1995, 6-7, 304-5).

My primary method for this dissertation will be a qualitative study that uses my own narrative by integrating it with theoretical analysis to explore personal experiences of trauma and violence within postcolonial frameworks. Using autoethnography will also allow me to better address the gaps in postcolonial theory by including white-identifying American women's experience to expand postcolonial theory to show how these systems of exploitation and domination continue to cut across culture, race, gender, religion, and class. By directly engaging with foundational theories, this study can analyze the experiences of the uncolonized white North American female subject. This methodology intentionally avoids appropriating or disavowing the true lived experiences and narratives of colonized peoples of color while acknowledging the distinct complex dynamics of both groups. My intent for this research is to seek out and confront any colonial imperatives that could shape it, reduce it, or replace it with any colonial ideology that has been restructured to conform to the imperial establishment of knowledge (Young 2016, 386, 387).

Being a white-identifying woman from the United States who is doing research about the ways white women experience postcolonial violence and trauma, I find it necessary to acknowledge the complexity of my positionality. I do not claim equivalence with the experiences of colonized peoples; instead, this project examines how white women in the United States are also shaped by systems of patriarchal and postcolonial power while acknowledging my position as a colonized white-identifying, complicit, and privileged female.

Building upon this framework, my goal is to use postcolonial scholarship by including the experiences of white women, thereby challenging rigid binary distinctions such as colonizer versus colonized, privileged versus oppressed, and male versus female. These binary distinctions, created under colonialism and continuing in the postcolonial era, risk oppressing marginalized populations further by dividing individuals into fixed categories, which ultimately reinforces dominant hegemonic structures. These binary distinctions, created under colonialism and that continue in the postcolonial era, sustain colonial ideologies by illuminating the fear of difference and constructing the "Other" as a threat which upholds these systems of postcolonial dominance, violence, and control.

Qualitative Research Design

In their article "I'm Interested in Autoethnography, but How Do I Do It?" Robin Cooper and Bruce V. Lilyea (2022, 197) state that autoethnography allows the author, who also acts as the researcher, to explore and synthesize different perspectives that critically analyze a significant cultural experience by reflecting on their own personal history. This type of qualitative methodology helps shape theoretical frameworks with lived experience, which is crucial to understanding identity and its intersections with gender, race, class, and culture (Boylorn and Orbe 2014).

The traditional ethnographic research method is not the same as autoethnography, differing in a number of ways. First, autoethnography centers on the researcher's lived experience as their primary source of data and explores how their own perspectives relate to a broader cultural context. In contrast, ethnography focuses on the cultures, patterns, and behaviors of others in a cultural group through the researcher's interactions with participants in their natural settings over a set period of time. Ethnographers collect data mainly through interviews and interactions within the groups they study (Creswell 2014, 14). Both autoethnography and ethnography emerged from anthropology, the humanities, and the social sciences, which have gained popularity in recent years (Jacob 1987; Kirk and Miller 1986). Creswell contends that in any qualitative research design, the investigator plays a crucial role in gathering data using various collection techniques that emphasize context, culture, personal and societal issues, along with a focus through a holistic analysis (Creswell 2014, 212; Cooper and Lilyea 2022, 201). Creswell also argues that autoethnography and ethnography are each subject to their own bias. Therefore, the data collection procedures for both qualitative research methods should employ analytical approaches like using triangulation, pattern recognition, thematic analysis, and highlighting key events and strategies in their field study (Creswell 2014, 209, 212; Cooper and Lilyea 2022, 201-2).

I chose autoethnography as my qualitative research method so I can explore the intersections of race, class, gender, and culture to deconstruct postcolonial systems of violence that lead to oppression and injustice to women and nature. Using autoethnography as a methodology allows me to deconstruct colonial systems of violence by highlighting the distinct ways white women in the United States experience violence within broader cultural, racial, and gendered contexts. This not only gives space for these diverse populations to share in their own

voice, but it also decentralizes colonial Western strategies and frameworks that sustain power and hegemonic cultural representation (Boylorn and Orbe 2021, 15). Additionally, autoethnography allows me to acknowledge ethical issues of complicity and privilege as a white North American woman. Reflexivity allows me in my role as the researcher to discuss bias in the study but also interrogates my personal background, which shapes my perspectives and interpretations in qualitative inquiry (Boylorn and Orbe 2021, 15; Creswell 2014, 185). Writing a narrative out of my own raced, gendered, classed, and sexed posture distinguishes my angle and reveals what is different from other viewpoints (Boylorn and Orbe 2021, 13).

Since autobiography goes beyond what an ethnographic study can offer, this method allows me to explore and achieve an in-depth understanding of a cultural problem by constructing a narrative of my own lived experience that discusses the violence and trauma of postcolonialism critiqued through an ecofeminist lens.

Chang (2008) also notes that autoethnography integrates personal autobiography with cultural critique, providing distinct perspectives on lived experiences. Chang looks at the larger dimension of the meaning of culture since the researcher's personal experiences are used as a primary source of data in autoethnography. Chang argues that culture is symbiotic, dealing with the relationship between individuals and the human interaction of individuals within a group (16). For Chang, the question is not about *defining* culture but rather *locating* a culture. Chang considers the two main academic anthropological interpretations of culture which are seen as either an external entity, or something that is internalized within individuals' minds (17). By emphasizing the dual positions that can define or interpret the meaning or location of culture, Chang challenges auto-ethnographers to examine the depth of how culture considers these various viewpoints that shape lived experiences of a culture. Chang argues that locating a culture

should transcend geographical, linguistic, national, or other presumed boundaries to accurately reflect the true lived experiences of individuals within a population (16-18).

Chang (2008, 32) also observes that self-narratives have become very popular today in anthropology and the humanities because it aims to understand the self and others with the greater purpose of the autoethnography to serve the broader cultural understanding and interpretation of a research problem. Chang argues that oneself is always in relation to other people in the world, like family and other community members that participate in various contexts. Self-reflection and recollection help an individual understand themself in a broader complex way that provides new perspectives and dimensions through virtue and self-examination (33, 41). Chang also observes that the anthropological nature of an autoethnography involves a manifestation of multiple histories since human beings see themselves in relation to other people. Chang concurs that the self-narrative often connects to other individuals' autobiographies. For instance, parents and other family members directly contribute to and shape the views of other individuals within the family (44). Chang posits that a self-narrative is *not* a one-sided story; therefore, it deepens connections among people of different races and cultures. Chang remarks that autoethnography is extremely beneficial in helping white middle-class females to understand the struggles and experiences of people of color (34).

Boylorn and Orbe (2014) discovered that critical autoethnography can provide a lens to examine the intersectionality of gender, sex, class, race, and culture which gives agency to marginalized populations. Like Chang, they argue that culture is difficult to define, having more than three hundred published definitions (Boylorn and Orbe 2014, 15). Therefore, they view culture in a way that shows diversity, subjectivity, and inclusivity, aligning autoethnography within this framework (15). For Boylorn and Orbe, their goal for autoethnography is to utilize a

method that appreciates similarities and differences of different cultures and the intersections of identity that plays a role in recognizing complex cultural viewpoints (15). Boylorn and Orbe look to scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, the scholar who introduced the term "intersectionality," to explore complex and multifaceted identities (15). While examining legal implications that disadvantage Black women, they conclude that autoethnography is "therapeutic" and "performative" and able to resist constructed stereotypes placed on women of color in the context of the representation of distinct experiences (18).

Boylorn and Orbe (2014, 17) contend that this type of personal narrative is a critical cultural analysis that turns the gaze on the self, enabling Crenshaw to author her first autoethnography, "Working Class Black Girl," with genuine authenticity and agency. Boylorn found that the narrative approach of autoethnography allowed her to write about her own experiences from the perspective of her actual gender, race, and position as a woman (13). Boylorn and Orbe, with Chang, concur that autoethnography gives "voice" to the true experiences of the oppressed, but also that it goes further in qualitative research to examine the complexity of identity across culture and difference. Boylorn and Orbe state that there are multi-faceted dimensions of identity that occur at different phases in one's life which cannot completely explore all the possibilities of the intersections through other qualitative research methodologies (18). Boylorn and Orbe contend that the constructs and stereotypes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social orientations must apply multiple perspectives according to their own narratives (19-21).

Autoethnography directly challenges binary distinctions and deconstructs social normatives by applying a critical lens to distinctive cultural standpoints where other qualitative research methods fail (Boylorn and Orbe 2014, 16-19). For Boylorn and Orbe, this methodology

illuminates systems of oppression, power, or privilege. For example, they show how these methods can negotiate the labels and stereotypes that restrict their authenticity of their own true self; consequently, it would also restrict the authenticity for the broader, more accurate representation of cultural oppression (22).

For Boylorn and Orbe, autoethnographic studies link personal experiences to critical theory by focusing on individuals in their specific moments, places, and contexts. These studies also expose systems of oppression and social conditions, bridging the gap between theory and action to challenge the dominance found in traditional academic research methods. Unlike these conventional approaches, autoethnography embraces the complex and varied realities of its subjects, presenting their "messy" diversity more authentically (Boylorn and Orbe 2014, 19).

In summary, autoethnography uses the researcher's own personal experiences as the main source of data, examining how these experiences connect to wider cultural, social, and political environments (Chang 2008). On the other hand, ethnography studies the cultures and behaviors of others by observing and interacting with participants in their natural environments (Creswell 2014).

Methodology for Resistance

Chang (2008, 46) insists that, due to developing variation of ethnographies, it is important to follow a balance of methodologies when writing an autoethnography. Chang suggests that autoethnography should maintain a triple balance by first anchoring ethnographic methods and maintaining cultural consistency in its interpretive approach while also incorporating autobiographical elements into its content (48). Nonetheless, this does not prevent some scholars from critiquing this research method. Chang argues that autoethnography involves subjectivity and bias, and it lacks the objective scrutiny typically conducted by other researchers

(45). However, Alhayek and Zeno (2023, 554, 549) argue that autoethnography serves as not only a method for resistance but also helps in dismantling dominant Western epistemologies that perpetuate academic collusion by authoritative figures in academia and research. Furthermore, they posit that ethnography requires approval from institutional review boards who are not only biased but colonial. Alhayek and Zeno concur that there is no true scientific and systematic approach to objectivity when it "sits" on capitalist imperial foundations (550).

Autoethnography should not be solely self-focused; instead, it should involve using one's own experiences as a lens to explore and understand broader cultural and societal contexts (Chang 2008, 49). Boylorn and Orbe (2021) assert that autoethnographic research plays a crucial role in exploring the "politics" of identity. They argue that by delving into the nuanced boundaries of individual experiences, this method uncovers variations in how identities are expressed and perceived within broader cultural and anthropological contexts. Keep in mind that these explorations are not confined to aspects of race, gender, or class alone, but instead, they investigate how these and other factors intersect with personal identity to shape the dynamics of resistance and self-definition (120).

Beattie (2021, 100) also sees autoethnographic research as an anthropological history with the subjects being studied in their own natural environment and time period. Beattie discovered that the subject's research data is an "embodied" epistemology which goes beyond confined borders shaping the production of knowledge through language, power, and *courage*. The researcher's viewpoints continually reinterpret connections within that interact with other contexts of cultural experiences and Eurocentric histories that leave out cultures of whose perspectives and identities have not been represented in the world or in scholarship (100).

Creswell (2014, 14) agrees that autoethnography is a great qualitative research method that can thoroughly examine the social patterns of a cultural group which can provide a critical analysis and interpret cultural phenomena, uncovering deeper nuances within social, cultural, and political contexts. Autoethnography involves a complex examination of a cultural issue where the author serves as both researcher and primary subject. It allows the researcher to consider significant moments in their lives while they explore emerging and shifting outlooks on a subject (Cooper and Lilyea 2022, 198). This dual role makes it essential for the writer to clearly define the research procedures and thoughtfully shape the method's framework and structure (197-98).

To summarize, this qualitative research design enables me to analyze my narrative as data, to generate meaning through reflexive insight, cultural analysis, and scholarly synthesis. The method offered a grounded hypothesis which showed how violence and trauma reflect broader patterns of postcolonial and patriarchal systems that operate within United States institutions and culture. This method provides opportunity to use my own experiences to serve as future case studies for examining how postcolonial power operates differently across geopolitical, legal, cultural, and religious contexts. Autoethnographic methodology supports my larger vision, which is to use this work to help individuals to reclaim their own identity, history, memory, and be able to narrate trauma through their own words and perspectives.

Data Collection

My primary source of data has been derived from qualitative documents and visuals from my own personal life experiences. As in most qualitative methods, the collection of data can come from several sources such as public documents, newspaper articles, public records, court records, minutes from meetings, emails, letters, notices, reports, doctor bills, judicial decisions,

medical records, journals, diaries, memories, self-reflected data, interviews, stories, social media, films, or from visual materials such as photos and artifacts.

My collection of data was largely collected from numerous types of public documents, newspaper articles, court records, minutes from meetings, notes, and emails. I have also collected data from my own self-reflections, medical records, memories, personal journals, reflexive diary, and from visual materials such as photographs. I organized the data and grouped them into categories for the purpose of discovery. I found emerging patterns and themes developing throughout the findings that I manually coded and categorized using an inductive data analysis by building thorough, cognitive, and relatable themes as I discovered them. After reviewing my findings, I deduced that I had gathered enough evidence that supports the connections of my research on post-colonial phenomena and examined how my lived experiences related to patriarchal violence and trauma. My critically established theoretical framework has been validated by the literature review which reinforced credible academic resources who are experienced and knowledgeable in the field of post-colonial studies. Additionally, I verified that the questions or processes in the emergent design did not change or need further examination (Creswell 2014, 186). Since my own life is the primary data, I utilized reflexivity using a diary to discuss how my role as a researcher held biases due to my own worldviews, culture, upbringing, and values that shaped the work I have approached.

Individuals perceive and interpret reality in remarkably distinct ways, with or without biases. I discovered through autoethnography that the true way to understand human behavior requires an individual to immerse themselves in the perspectives of the individual who has the lived experiences, seeing the world directly through their eyes (Beattie 2021). To be as accountable and transparent as possible, I remained in a continuous reflexive orientation by

documenting my thoughts in a diary during the analysis which included asking myself a set of questions, answering them, and recording them in the notes (Cooper and Lilyea 2022, 199–201).

In her examination of Deleuze, Beattie argues that the larger philosophical project for researchers should be to resist hierarchical structures and sentiments in Western academic epistemologies that do not allow the researcher to examine meaning from critical self-actualization. This means subjects will engage in a reflexive analysis that rejects the self-limitations of obtaining the full meaning and experience that "disrupts" neatly arranged power and knowledge relations (Beattie 2021, 146–50). As such, I addressed my role and positionality in the research outcomes and explained how my own background and views shaped my personal narrative. My findings are parallel to the broader cultural experiences of oppressed populations who revealed personal experiences and societal associations that were consistent with the theories of hybridity, stereotypical representation, traumatic psychopathology, generational wounding, identity crisis, dehumanization, erased histories, ambivalence, economic exploitation, epistemic violence, white privilege, complicity and oppression.

In summary, autoethnography can use triangulation and collect data from other sources and use mixed methods however the means of the narrative is to examine the primary data which is intricately detailed and should be the sole focus of the inquiry because it exposes multiple viewpoints that situates intersectional or hybrid identities; therefore, it is important to look at the primary source of the narrative in various ways which examines the validity of the data, the interpretive processes, ethical and analytic procedures, and research design and framework (Creswell 2014, 210; Boylorn and Orbe 2021, 18-20).

Data Analysis

Even though an autoethnographic research method is not specifically related to one

theoretical method, it does constitute theory, ethnography, and phenomenology; therefore, I will incorporate qualitative coding methods such as descriptive coding, emotional coding, and inscriptive coding to ensure my data is thoroughly examined. I will code by hand using transcripts of my narrative to get the deepest interpretation, descriptions, thematic patterns, and meaning as I explore themes and examine the accuracy and validity of the data sets by locating key words and patterns and using as many categories as possible (Creswell 2014, 190, 195, 197; Cooper and Lilyea 2022, 199-201).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review explores how white women in the United States experience postcolonial violence and trauma. Postcolonial theory offers a critical framework to help interpret and understand the complexities, divergencies, and dynamics in colonial power and cultural representation. In this chapter, I will present the main ideas and arguments of five foundational theorists of postcolonial theory and then explain how these ideas shape my research. While each theorist engages from a distinct disciplinary perspective ranging from psychology and literary theory to feminist and cultural studies, all of them expose how colonialism never was just a political or territorial occupation, but is a deeply embedded system of knowledge, representation, and social control (Hawley 1999; Young 2016, 5, 7, 281). These foundational scholars are relevant to my study because they provide a critical theoretical framework to help me analyze how colonial power was constructed not only through direct violence, but internalized psychologically through inferior epistemological, cultural, gendered, and economical representation (Young 2016, 5-8; Fanon 2004, 98-101).

Since postcolonial scholarship traditionally focuses on the experience of colonized individuals, this literature review will use postcolonial scholarship to analyze how colonial systems of violence affect white-identifying women in the United States. This challenges colonialism's rigid binary distinctions that further risk marginalizing oppressed populations by dividing individuals into fixed categories that ultimately reinforce dominant hegemonic structures. It also shows how white women in the United States simultaneously experience and sustain postcolonial violence while also resisting it. Each unique perspective in postcolonial and feminist theory helps me investigate ways I can build an ecofeminist consciousness that can

resist and dismantle violent and oppressive systems on a broader cultural scale without universalizing any woman's experience.

Therefore, this literature review provides a critical analysis showing how colonial structures did not end in the postcolonial era but continue to operate in the contemporary. The literature will reveal the ways postcolonial strategies and an ecofeminist praxis can inform my own lived experience that will later be examined in the autoethnographic section that reflects the findings of this research. The data will show how the arguments, ideas, and questions from these theorists' function as a means to build and expand upon the foundations of post-colonial and eco-feminist theory by addressing the gap.

Examining the colonized subject's experience of post-colonial trauma and violence alongside the theories of these leading scholars, also functions as a conceptual framework, a bridge essential to the present study which seeks to understand how white women in the United States experience violence and trauma within systems of power that are both patriarchal and postcolonial. Although white women have typically been counted among the colonizers and not the colonized, their experiences of gendered violence, social marginalization, and complicity within racial hierarchies must be analyzed through the same lens that interrogates colonial structures.

Correlating postcolonial trauma and violence by cultural, epistemological, gendered, and economic representation, this literature review will unveil the ideological, psychological, and material processes by which colonized peoples were subjugated and how these very processes have been adapted and sustained in the so-called postcolonial era. In the sections that follow, my interlocutors' work will be organized thematically to show how these theories develop, intersect, and diverge across several core issues.

Frantz Fanon (2008), Edward Said (1979), Homi K. Bhabha (2004), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010a), and Anne McClintock (1995) all argue that colonial systems sustain power through epistemic production and control which leads to trauma and violence. Each thinker interrogates the effects of cultural violence and the hegemonic framing of culture, gender, class, and race, revealing how colonial power continues to operate and sustain authority through structural oppression (Young 2016, 44-46).

Bhabha (2004) uses semiotics and literary theory in a psychoanalytic framework to interrogate how knowledge is produced, represented, and circulated. In *The Location of Culture,* he examines how power operates through language and texts that are open to multiple interpretations that shape and reinforce societal normatives. Bhabha's theoretical work centers on identity, showing how hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and stereotypes operate as ongoing colonial strategies. Using autoethnography as a methodology, Bhabha's post-structuralist approach allows me to apply his theories to investigate my own lived, embodied experience of postcolonial violence and trauma as a colonized complicit white woman in the United States.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1979) also argues that power and knowledge are deeply interconnected through discursive colonial and post-colonial practices. Like Bhabha, he argues that the West's negative portrayal of the Orient reinforced economic and political authority which justified dominance after colonial occupation ended. For Said, the West's depiction of Orientalism was solidified by the repetition of language, texts, and techniques, which turned a form of ideology into the representation of actual truth and meaning (Young 2016, 387-89). Said's (1979, 54, 60, 99, 102) work is important for my research because he shows how Western narratives and codes construct inferior stereotypes that further cultural, social, sexual, and religious distinctions which still exist today. Said contends that writers and other intellectuals

were indoctrinated by Western epistemologies and used their knowledge in disciplines like language, science, and history to advance broader governmental and economic agendas. For Said, these specially trained "experts" legitimized colonial authority as they weakened the narrative and history of the Orient and their credibility (124, 223).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is best known for her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak's (2010a) work looks at how power dynamics affect the production and circulation of knowledge. Like Bhabha and Said, Spivak also argues that knowledge is produced and represented by the West. For Spivak (2010a, 237), Western colonial discourse is inextricably tied to global economic interests in which the West's dominance perpetrated violence through the control and representation of knowledge. Spivak (2010b, 26) asserts that the "production narrative" instituted by Western ideologies became the catalyst for the assemblage of knowledge in hegemonic world systems. She states the problem left a wide-open space for Western powers to usher in a complete "catachresis" of contextual schemes where oversimplified meanings misrepresented the working class, especially for women, who have been rendered invisible or completely erased (26). Her work coincides with my erasure and silencing in the workplace and justice systems in the United States.

While Fanon's work specifically addresses psychological trauma experienced by colonized people of color, his theoretical work on trauma and violence can be useful for understanding how white women in the United States experience patriarchal trauma and violence shaped by postcolonial strategies and a continued colonial discourse in the world today. Fanon (2004, 26-28) focuses on how colonial strategies persist through neocolonialism and the capitalist, racialized agenda of the West that exploit people across racial, class, and cultural lines.

For Fanon (2008, xi), postcolonial violence is not a contradiction but a continuation of colonial violence under new forms.

Anne McClintock focuses on gendered and sexualized trauma for both colonized and colonizing women. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, McClintock (1995) critiques foundational post-colonial theory, particularly Bhabha, Fanon, and Said, for mostly omitting the experiences and the gendered roles of colonized women and the role they played in colonial discourse. She argues that post-colonial theorists largely overlooked the material and domestic dynamics that exploited women's labor and sexuality under imperial control. She is important to my work because she utilizes more contemporary cultural studies, feminist theory, and psychoanalysis to show how women's experiences of colonialism are significantly different from men's and must thus be examined through the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality (5). She also interrogates how complicit white women experience post-colonial trauma and violence. However, McClintock does not focus specifically on white-identifying women in the United States; rather, her work centers on white settler women within the context of British imperialism in South Africa.

All these scholars paved a way for me to examine how their theories in post-colonial studies mirror my own embodied experiences of trauma, oppression, and violence. While Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and McClintock provide foundational insights about postcolonial theory, my research diverges from theirs in several important ways. First, the historical context of their work is grounded in direct or historic experiences of colonization where colonial occupation and its aftermath shaped the world. In contrast, my autoethnographic study examines my experience as a colonized, disadvantaged, white-identifying woman in the United States, a non-colonized location. Additionally, McClintock does not do an extensive empirical analysis of white-

identifying women in the United States. Nevertheless, I argue that post-colonial violence is still ongoing throughout the world and exists in the United States even though it may often be more subtle or symbolic.

Women under colonization all face exploitation, violence, and trauma. However, white women in the United States face a different form of this violence. This is why it is so important for me to use post-colonial scholarship to include white-identifying women while avoiding universalizing anyone's experience. These systems often mask deeper forms of institutional control that carry different social, legal, and political implications depending on one's culture, race, gender, and geographical location. Therefore, my research uses a postcolonial framework and applies it to the lived realities of women who, though not colonized in the traditional sense, are subjected to internalized and systematized forms of dominance that reproduce postcolonial logic and help sustain it.

While postcolonial theory names the systems that produce violence and trauma, the theory also leaves space for resistance; therefore, through an eco-feminist and contemplative spiritual praxis, my research will provide my response to healing and survival.

How Post-Colonial Power Was Constructed

Language, Signs, Representation

To understand how white women in the U.S. experience postcolonial trauma, how colonial systems, in general, construct and maintain their authority over colonized people. Bhabha's (2004, 69) work in post-structuralism and critical literary theory draws on the study of signification, which he identifies as a colonial strategy designed to embed ideologies, myths, and stereotypes into human consciousness. For Bhabha, the production and development of knowledge is traced from negative connotations and the mixed signals of signs. He explains that

semiology refers to the process of producing meaning and knowledge through signs. Signs may include words, objects, images, or anything that has the potential to produce meaning through constructed and continued usage. In *Methodology of the Oppressed: Theory Out of Bounds*, Chela Sandoval (2000, 92,3–94,5) examines Roland Barthes's work on semiotics, which explains that a sign is composed of two elements: the *signifier* is the actual physical form the sign takes, and the *signified* is the sign's conceptual or mental perception of the meaning of the form that it represents. Simply stated, the relationship between the two is not natural or fixed but socially constructed through repeated usage that forms ideological meanings.

When anything is added to the first-level sign, it creates a second level sign of signification, adding layers and multiple dimensions of meaning. Barthes argues that dominant ideas are formed through this narrative linguistic colonial strategy that changes the structure of the sign into patterned and thematically arranged ideas (Sandoval 2000, 94,5–96,7). Barthes observes that ideologies can change their form, identity, and how they are distinguished and reproduced (90,1). Bhabha (2004, 64) warns that it is imperative to understand the sign in its original context because any mixing or doubling of the sign can shift perception and drastically change the meaning and content of the sign.

While Spivak converges with Bhabha in rejecting binary thinking, she focuses on her own cultural context and the representation of the working class. Spivak (2010b, 27-28) opposes hegemonic Western political discourse that speaks for others, particularly subaltern groups. Spivak stresses that such representation contradicts the "theoretical process" of interpreting meaning because it reduces identities to economic interests (27–28). She rejects any representation that simplifies the working class that is associated with Western capitalist narratives.

Bhabha (2004, 66) and Spivak (2010b, 33) argue that colonial identity is altered when the perspective or frame is shaped by Western consciousness. For Bhabha, human identity is constructed through its perception of depth in which ideologies function to expand the initial meaning denoted by the sign; therefore, linguistics is humanly constructed in its duplicated frame, and a third object can be produced by signification itself (71). Linguistic meaning becomes transformative when grammatical structures and signs interact, allowing the combination of symbolic units to alter and generate new interpretations (Tracy 1987, 54-55). Bhabha (2004, 68) stresses that these "metalanguages" reposition the structure of identity from the realm of a visual perception to that of written discourse; therefore, these additional dimensions exploit the representation of the binary representation of both the "Self" and the "Other." When these meanings are repeated over time, they start to feel normal or obvious because they become profoundly ingrained in our consciousness, which influences the way we view the world. For Bhabha, the colonial system requires continuous reassertion of their narrative in order to maintain the tarnished image they construct of colonized people through signs (36, 68–69). Bhabha states that continued repetition is needed in order to create negative stereotypes that oppress the subjugated culture (274). However, Bhabha argues that the constant need for repetitive images over time can also work *against* the colonizer. This allows the subjugated culture to re-represent themselves through this ambivalent moment in which re-inscription and negotiation can take place in the subliminal space (274). Bhabha agrees that one's genuine identity cannot be solely understood by merely observing an image or individual. When meaning is interrogated through a different narrative, it reveals a different reflected reality (68). In the intricate layers that linguistics function, any meaning generated without specific structure can change the identity into what Barthes terms "semiotic mythology" (Sandoval 2000,

94,5–96,7). Bhabha relates this resemblance with what he identifies as the structure of difference (76). It is critical to realize that there is not an innate, natural link between the physical word *signifier* and its associated meaning of "the signified." Barthes instead looks at how the relationship is shaped by historical patterns, repetition, and societal understanding, rather than inherency (Sandoval 2000, 90,1, 92,3).

Like Bhabha, Spivak (2010b, 28) argues that by creating a simple binary opposition between two concepts, exploits the oppressed through a double meaning of representation. Spivak is very concerned with the production of ideological theory which is schematically and textually a subject-predicate dynamic (26, 28). When grammatical elements and signs are combined, they can generate additional layers of meaning that produce cultural myths that reinforce binary oppositions and ideological structures (Tracy 1987, 55-56). Spivak (2010b, 33) states that these ideologies politically and economically silence the representation of the subaltern because of the West's fragmented philosophical and historical narratives.

In *Orientalism*, Said (1979) examines who holds the power to produce knowledge and who is granted the authority to represent that knowledge. For Said, power and knowledge are deeply interconnected through discursive colonial and postcolonial practices. He converges with Spivak and Bhabha's argument that the Western representation of culture, gender, and race was solidified by the repetition of narratives, language, texts, and techniques, which turned a form of ideology into the representation of actual truth and meaning (Young 2016, 387-89). For Said, these perceptions and modes of theory that cross many academic disciplines result in a "hybrid" mentality (387, 388). Therefore, Said argues that there cannot be any "true representations" of anything reproduced, restructured, woven together, or tainted by different perceptions in misrepresenting hegemonic power (391).

Said (1979, 25) goes further in his discourse on binary thinking in *Orientalism* which frames his theory and provides a very organized thematic chronological order of the construction of the East. Said posits that a binary distinction lies in labeling; specifically, how the West was the "Occident" and the East was called the "Orient." This consciousness reinforced the concept of authority in colonial discourse, designating who was in charge of producing knowledge and who was benefiting from it (2). For Said, these compelling distinctions were filled with moral and racial connotations, which exemplified the perception that the Orient was culturally, ethically, and epistemically inferior. This gave the West geographical and intellectual superiority by contrasting it with a fabricated image of the Orient's aberrant mentality and cultural backwardness (7, 38).

Spivak (2010b, 33) also argues that signification of a binary divides or splits the subject, intentionally misrepresenting the context and the relationship of the subject. Spivak agrees with Said that this influences the staging or the portrayal of representation in an economic context. Spivak argues that the model of representation is contradictory in the sense that they relate; however, they are also discontinuous because the "theoretical process" of transforming consciousness into knowing is shaped by practices that assign labels that categorize identity to economic interests (28-29). Spivak suggests this approach fails to produce a represented class that are in community with another. This disconnection happens when economic disparities within a class separates their shared existence and the "natural exchange" between families, especially when economic and political systems become the dominant discourse for the mode of representation (Spivak 2010a, 245).

Said (2004) insists that Orientalism executed its narrative framework by assigning the East a predetermined location, history, and form of nationalism. Said confers that this imperialist

strategy helped the West to manage and study the Orient more readily which resulted in Orientals being classified by a dominating Eurocentric epistemological and ontological framework that served colonial objectives and justified European colonization of Egypt (39-42).

Myths and Narratives of Race, Gender, and Class

Colonial power has always been embedded in carefully constructed myths and narratives, fundamentally shaping the identities and psyches of both colonizers and colonized. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock (1995, 5-7) argues that these cultural texts reinforce postcolonial strategies of dominance, domestic violence and trauma by shaping how race, gender, class, and national identity are represented. While McClintock does not explicitly engage in semiotics, signage, or literary theory in the technical sense, she builds on the foundational work of post-colonial theorists by examining how cultural narratives, such as advertising, visual images, and popular literature carry meanings that function like signs and symbols. McClintock particularly examines how images and social symbols construct and enforce sexual, gendered, and racial differences (6, 16, 30). She insists that difference itself is not the inherent problem; rather, the problem arises when strategies of "othering" rely on rigid binaries that organize people into ranked hierarchies, assigning superiority or inferiority in relation to one another (7, 31–33). McClintock argues that these hierarchical binaries are essential to sustaining colonial ideologies, especially in controlling women, their bodies, and their gendered roles, keeping them confined to the lowest positions within imperial power structures (31–33).

Like Bhabha, Spivak, and Said, McClintock is concerned with how binary oppositions and constructed differences sustain post-colonial domination and gendered control, including white women's complicity and privilege. She argues that this dynamic contributes to the ongoing

violence and trauma experienced by women under contemporary postcolonial systems (McClintock 1995, 6). McClintock aligns with Said and Bhabha's critique that Western hegemonic powers used stereotypes to maintain control, but she extends their arguments by interrogating how gendered structures shape imperial domination (5). McClintock (1995, 5) builds on Said's (1979, 207) foundational claim that European men functioned as "direct agents" of empire, yet she critiques his limited examination of how gendered power operated within imperial systems. Said analyzes Orientalist discourse as an institution, a system of exchange between imaginative and academic narrative. These narratives present themselves as knowledge, but are detached from genuine social, scientific, or Enlightenment critique, reinforcing European supremacy (Young 2016, 386). While Said critiques how the Orient is feminized and exoticized in Western narratives, McClintock (1995, 14) expands this by showing how imperial discourse explicitly sexualized Eastern women, positioning their bodies as objects of Western male possession and control. Said (1979, 207) explains that these narratives produce rigid gender distinctions that compare Oriental women to Western women, reinforcing racial and gender hierarchies. As Said writes, "This is especially evident in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (207). However, McClintock argues that women do not experience colonialism in the same way as men, nor do they face the same postcolonial dilemmas (14).

McClintock (1995, 6) explicitly states that colonialism was a system structured through hierarchical violence from its onset, but for colonized women, this hierarchy was compounded by gendered oppression. She explains that colonized women were forced to "negotiate conflicted gendered engagements" within their own communities and with European imperial men, whose

authority reshaped gendered oppression (6). McClintock further argues that white colonial women occupied a contradictory position within the empire**.** While racially privileged, they were excluded from formal power, such as military or economic decision-making, and confined to domestic and sexual duties, what she terms the "cult of domesticity" (6). Though complicit in empire and benefitting from racial privilege, white women were still subject to gendered hierarchies within imperial systems. For McClintock, postcolonial power cannot be fully analyzed without a gendered framework that interrogates how politics, economics, and gender intersect to shape the lived realities of both colonized and white women (6, 14–17).

She situates this inequality within the broader patriarchal structures of organized religion, fundamentalist ideologies, and political-economic agendas that reinforce male dominance (14). Without universalizing women's experiences, McClintock argues that women are disproportionately disadvantaged by these systems through unequal political and economic power, confinement to gendered labor roles, the burden of the double workday, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence (14). For McClintock, these gendered realities must be readily observed in any postcolonial analysis of power, violence, and structural inequality.

McClintock asserts that stereotyping and gendering female subjects, including white women, is essential to sustaining imperial dominance. She triangulates her argument by drawing on Bhabha's theory of ambivalence and fluidity, arguing that gendered and racialized oppression are produced "in and through" one another within colonial discourse (McClintock 1995, 5). Like Bhabha, she emphasizes that colonial power contradicts itself while undermining subjugated populations that they depend on to construct its own superiority. McClintock contends that the colonial project required an "Other" to reinforce and deepen stereotypes; without difference, colonizers would have no basis for comparison or self-definition (5).

McClintock illustrates this by comparing Haggard's imperial maps to representations of women's bodies, showing how colonial narratives are highly sexualized, just as women's bodies are within patriarchal systems (McClintock 1995, 2–3). She directly links land, nature, and the female body, arguing that colonial strategies exploit both as resources to be controlled (3). Said interrogates who speaks for and represents oppressed populations through racial and gender ideologies, while McClintock extends the critique by examining how gender, sexuality, and the material body are central to the production of imperial power. This argument converges with Spivak's critique of epistemic violence and gendered labor exploitation. McClintock clarifies that although she proceeds with a gendered analysis of postcolonialism, the colonial project is not simply about "othering" or symbolic subjugation for the sake of authority. Instead, she argues it is a deliberately constructed system intended to produce extreme, structural imbalances of power that function through violence and control (16).

For Said, the West established power over the Orient by fabricating both historical and imaginative discourses, grounded in epistemic and ontological stereotypes. He argues that this discursive strategy systematically undermined the Orient by embedding false narratives that rationalized the economic gendered, and political goals of colonialism (Said 1979, 2, 32). In this construction, the Orient was simultaneously romanticized as an exotic land of ancient beauty and landscapes, while also portrayed as inferior in its customs, languages, and people depicted as stagnant and regressive compared to the so-called progressive mind of the West (46). This contradictory framing reflects what Bhabha (2004, 75–78) identifies as ambivalence, a colonial strategy that constructs the colonized subject as both desirable and inferior, reinforcing dominance while exposing instability.

Fanon also exposes how postcolonial discourse sustains itself through the strategy of stereotyping. He demonstrates that colonized subjects may embody European cultural practice such as speaking their language, dressing according to European standards, engaging intellectually; however, they are still rejected, alienated, and marked as inferior solely because of their blackness (Fanon 2008, 8, 12). For Fanon, this constructed inferiority operates as a form of psychological warfare that becomes internalized, as black individuals confront the pervasive "white gaze" and the mythologized notion of Black identity imposed upon them (128). Said further connects this to scientific and racial discourses, arguing that the West's portrayal of the Orient as backward and uncivilized was reinforced by scientific claims, including Darwinist theories that legitimized racism and biological determinism (Said 1979, 206–7). Through what he terms *latent Orientalism*, Said contends that scholarship, racial hierarchies, and gendered discourses ordered cultures into categories of advancement or inferiority, dehumanizing Orientals, particularly women and other marginalized groups, and framing them as obstacles to progress (206–7).

Fanon's work converges with both Said and Bhabha's critiques of stereotypes as a colonial strategy that aggressively marks difference across racial, historical, sexual, and cultural lines. Fanon argues that colonial systems deliberately pit white and black children, women and men against one another to reinforce dominance embedding social hierarchies that perpetuate inferiority and alienation (Fanon 2008, 128). He insists that understanding the being of the Black colonized subject requires acknowledgment of the psychological, existential, and historical dimensions imposed by colonial structures, including how stereotypes and myths of racial inferiority are constructed and maintained (90, 93).

Bhabha (2004, 95, 106–7) extends this analysis by emphasizing that the problem with stereotypes is not simply their negative content, but their ambivalence, which generates a constant tension between familiarity and disruption. The articulation of identity, Bhabha argues, becomes ambivalent in which stereotypes operate as discursive tools that produce irreconcilable ideas, simultaneously avowing and disavowing traits within the colonized subject (107). Identity is constructed by what physically, sexually, socially, and culturally distinguishes one from the dominant group, but these distinctions themselves are unstable, layered with contradictory meanings (95–96, 98).

This ambivalent representation deepens the splitting of identity, categorizing people into rigid compartments of race, gender, culture, and sexuality that serve to structure colonial hierarchies (Bhabha 2004, 96). Bhabha argues that these modes of representation produce what he calls the "colonial fantasy," a projection of both desire and fear onto the colonized Other (104, 114). Drawing from Freud's theory of fetishism, Bhabha contends that stereotyping involves more than creating distorted images; it requires the anxious repetition of splitting, displacing, and disguising colonial authority's fantasies and myths as stable truths (117).

Epistemic Violence

Psychological trauma from colonialism is maintained and reinforced through epistemic violence thereby controlling representation, silencing voices, and erasing histories. Spivak (2010b, 26, 35-37) connects psychological trauma to the silencing of subaltern voices, particularly through what she terms epistemic violence, which she argues is the erasure of entire systems of indigenous knowledge and self-representation. Like Bhabha, Said, and McClintock, Spivak rejects binary frameworks that categorize identity into simplistic oppositions. She warns

that hegemonic Western narratives destroy women's identities, particularly for working class women, perpetuating both material and ideological oppression (27–29).

Spivak (2010a, 292) furthers her argument by contending that the planned "epistemic violence of imperialism" operates beyond cultural subjugation. For Spivak (2010b, 26–28), this means it is embedded in militant structures designed to enforce dominance (see also McClintock 1995, 16). Spivak argues this violence is not abstract; it is carried out through the militarization of society, institutional power, and mechanisms such as legal codes, courts, prisons, police forces, and the deployment of weapons, all of which reinforce imperial hierarchies (McClintock 1995, 16). These systems of institutional violence uphold not only the economic and political interests of empire, but also the erasure and silencing of subaltern voices, particularly women, whose experiences remain marginalized within both historical and contemporary structures of postcolonial power.

Spivak (2010b, 35) argues that global capitalist structures and the international division of labor erased the identity, voice, and lived experiences of colonized populations by positioning them as "the Other." Spivak contends that Western imperial powers silence subjugated populations by producing and constructing knowledge which replaces the collective knowledge from individuals lived experience and their contributions to epistemology (35–37). For Spivak, this violence extends beyond academic disciplines into the everyday lives of nonacademic populations, where imperial knowledge production generates a capitalist mentality that rejects entire bodies of indigenous knowledge in favor of Western authority (35–37).

Said (1979) similarly exposes how colonial discourse operates to distort, silence, and dominate knowledge production, though he does not explicitly use the term *epistemic violence*. He argues that understanding the Orient as a discourse is essential to uncovering how the West

gained control over knowledge and subjugated the East (3, 94–95, 100). For Said, a "textual crisis" emerged as Western scholars translated, edited, and circulated false narratives about the Orient, which were then accepted as truth and reality (92, 94). Said posits that Orientalism became both an intellectual project and a political strategy. He claims that this myriad of knowledge was produced through academic literature, government policy, and administrative law designed to dominate the East (203). Legal documents, codes, and statutes were used as tools, strategies to gain epistemic control. Said states that embedding colonial authority into public policy and institutional frameworks is how negative ideologies about the Orient were constructed (93, 95, 102).

Spivak (2010b, 26–28, 33) builds directly upon Said's critique by naming epistemic violence as the mechanism through which imperial power sustains itself, particularly through legal systems, cultural narratives, and academic discourse that present themselves as objective; but in reality, silence marginalized populations. Spivak argues that one of the biggest examples of "epistemic violence" was the colonial codification of Hindu law under British rule. She said it erased indigenous legal *and* cultural traditions, imposing Western worldviews and laws onto colonized communities (36–37). Said (1979, 94–95) converges with Spivak when examining how Orientalist scholars, like Renan, constructed Western interpretations of the Orient as truth: thereby, reinforcing structural silencing and epistemic control on the Orient.

Said (1979, 125, 202) reveals how Orientalist knowledge evolved into a self-perpetuating economy of thought, shifting from academic discourse into a hegemonic structure grounded in scientific and philosophical legitimacy. He argues that Orientalism transformed from a distant, exotic concept into a familiar and unambiguous system of knowledge that framed the East as inferior, static, and unchanging (121, 125). Said asserts that philology, disguised as historical

science, established authority by European scholars by classifying languages and cultures by comparing and generalizing about them (135, 140, 149). For Said, Orientalism emerged from Western philology and Semantic studies which politically and institutionalized racialized the Orient through these discursive practices (149–50). Said asserts that these processes embedded binary comparisons Orientalism within academic discourse which justified imperial domination (143, 145).

Spivak's assessment of "native informants" parallels Said's analysis of Orientalists, like Renan. Both Spivak and Said reveal how figures aligned with Western epistemologies, whether they were European scholars or assimilated elites from certain colonized locations, solidified imperial authority by reinforcing distorted knowledge structures (Spivak 2010b, 38; Said 1979, 94–95). Spivak argues that native informants appeared to speak for the subaltern but, in reality, reproduced imperial narratives aligned with Western capitalist interests, thereby erasing the heterogeneous realities of subaltern women (38, 41). For Spivak, this foreclosure is not only cultural but deeply material. She states it is rooted in global economic systems that produce a sexual division of labor, perpetuate exploitation, and marginalize women through mechanisms such as population control (39–42).

Similarly, Said (1979, 93, 102) argues that knowledge was produced by the West by circulating multitudes of narratives throughout the Orient such as travel brochures, popular literature, novels, films, poetry, and administrative ordinances, laws, and police reports, which all reinforced Western authority while silencing the Orient. These texts along with legal documents and governmental codes, functioned as postcolonial strategies to institutionalize control and embed these false representations of the East within global political, economic, and institutional structures (93, 95–96, 102). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008, 125) recounts

that G. Legman stated that an average six-year-old American child viewed at least eighteen thousand scenes of torture and bloody violence perpetrated by native colonized populations.

Spivak (2010b, 39, 43; 2010a, 258) extends this analysis by also demonstrating how legal codes, capitalist markets, and international feminist movements align with bourgeois interests, continuing to marginalize subaltern women under the false pretense of representation. She asserts that neither elite nor proletariat women within colonial and postcolonial systems, can authentically represent the subaltern, particularly the urban subproletariat who is in the most marginalized class (2010b, 41–43; 2010a, 258). Spivak (2010b, 46–47) argues that excluding the urban subproletariat exacerbates the capitalist imperialism and the assimilation of colonized subjects, especially subaltern women, who are doubly marginalized by patriarchy and empire. For Spivak, British imperialists' redefinition of widow sacrifice from being a patriarchal cultural rite to being an outright crime pardoned Western colonial imperialism in the process because they were on a civilizing mission to "save brown women from brown men" (50, 56). Spivak argues that imperialism in any form gives agency to the male which always keeps the sexed subject silenced (57–58). Spivak is not arguing that self-immolation should be justified through Hindu law, ritual, or in any scriptural doctrine; however, she is arguing how the fervor of patriarchal ideology justifies and perpetuates violence and oppression against women (56). For Spivak, these imperial strategies deny women their lived experiences and mask the violence under colonial authority displaying women as "victims" (50, 52, 57–58).

Anne McClintock (1995, 6, 14) builds upon Spivak's work by exposing how post-colonial power is sustained through controlling women's bodies, sexualities, and domestic roles. Like Spivak, McClintock argues that colonial narratives are permeated with gendered contradictions, even among white colonist women. She contends that the militarization of gender

in the postcolonial context furthers inequality among sex and gender. She writes, “Sexuality as a trope for other power relations was certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power” (14).

McClintock extends Spivak’s argument by showing how myths of national identity and the image of domesticity among these hierarchies sustain the colonial project. For Spivak (2010b, 50–52) and McClintock (McClintock 1995, 68), the cultural production of women as symbols of purity or victimhood functions to aid the erasure of women, their experience, and their social and political agency which reinforces women as inferior.

Spivak and Said both agree that knowledge production is an epistemic strategy deeply entrenched in systems of imperial authority that operates through academic discourse, cultural texts, legal frameworks, and state policies. Spivak builds on this by exposing how epistemic violence, particularly through legal and economic structures, results in the erasure of culture and denies the subaltern woman the ability to speak. McClintock also argues that epistemic erasure reinforces imperial control by functioning as a system that produces knowledge and representation through disciplines such as history and science. Furthermore, both of their works demonstrate that knowledge is ultimately produced through political and economic dynamics designed to support and sustain Western dominance while erasing those populations who are the most oppressed.

Institutional Violence and Control

Identity and Ambivalence

Bhabha approaches postcolonial theory by examining *how* systems of exploitation continue to sustain themselves through discursive colonial discourse and representation. He argues that colonial power becomes reinscribed and produces hybrid and ambivalent forms of identity long after formal decolonization (Bhabha 2004, 2–5, 66–69, 94). Bhabha contends that

postcolonial exploitation operates not only through material or political domination, but through deeply embedded systems of cultural representation and identity construction. Colonial power produced hierarchies based on race, gender, class, religion, and culture in which they persist in postcolonial contexts through ambivalent and hybrid forms. Bhabha contends that exploitation is maintained through the discursive production of subjectivities that are simultaneously included and excluded, mimicked, normalized, and rejected (122–23). Like Spivak, Bhabha focuses on how identity is constructed in the "in-between" spaces of culture, revealing how populations continue to be exploited not only through domination but through subtle coercions, misrecognitions, symbolic erasure, hybridity, and ambivalence (36, 55–56, 113–15).

Bhabha (2004, 44–45) maintains that colonial stereotypes are not fixed but rather constructed in contradictory ways that are interpreted differently across cultural contexts and geographic locations. For Bhabha, these stereotypes function as colonial strategies that attempt to make identity static; however, they can also function to show the instability of colonial discourse itself. For Said (2004, 321–24), this aligns with the distorted representation that operates through hegemonic systems that reduced the Orient to what he describes as an "intellectual, political, and cultural satellite" of the West, particularly the United States.

Bhabha (2004, 36, 55–56, 94–97, 113–15) argues that a hybrid identity produces a fractured and unstable cultural space in which meaning and power can be renegotiated after exclusion and erasure; however, his theory on hybridity is not limited to the idea that colonized peoples simply inherit dual identities after occupation and oppression. For Bhabha, hybridity is a conflicted cultural space in which identity remains unstable in which trauma associated with colonization is not resolved; rather, it is exposed by contradiction. In Bhabha's liminal space,

there is a place for resistance even though the fractures in identity show the contradictions and inconsistency of colonial discourse and power.

Like Said (1979, 118, 119), Bhabha argues that race and supremacy are myths that are cultivated in the subversive framework of fantasy, stereotype, and displacement. Bhabha (2004, 77, 92) contends that the dual identity resulting from colonial tension positions the subject as both present and absent, addressing what he calls the "life or death" of the missing person who he defines as those disconnected from time, space, and historical presence due to imposed colonial identity. Similar to Spivak, Bhabha identifies how the marginalized subject is rendered invisible, as their true identities and histories are either negated or disavowed within dominant cultural frameworks (74–75). Bhabha asserts that the "Other" becomes seen only through the lens of Western constructed cultural, racial, or gendered difference which attempts to fix identity within static and distorted categories (74). For Bhabha, stereotyping functions as a contradiction that falsely represents the subject and causes erasure of their identity. When difference is emphasized, the subject becomes "signified" not through their lived reality, but through a colonial discourse that renders them both visible and invisible, both known and unknowable (74–75).

Bhabha (2004, 74, 77–79) connects this to what he terms the "conflict of judgment," where the colonized subject is situated within an ambiguous space and is judged, labeled, and controlled based on contradictory stereotypes; however, they are denied the agency to define or represent themselves. Spivak's analysis of epistemic erasure and silencing converges here. Both Spivak and Bhabha expose how marginalized subjects are constructed within ambivalent discursive spaces that at the same time erase their identity while making them objects of colonial knowledge.

Spivak's analysis of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's suicide can resonate with the silencing and disappearance that Bhabha describes. Bhubaneswari was a young revolutionary woman whose politically motivated suicide was misread as a case of sexual shame. Spivak (2010c, 229) contends that Bhubaneswari tried to be heard through her body, which brought her to an existential crisis—suicide. Spivak, by altering the way she thought about knowledge and the way ideology functions, discovered that Bhubaneswari indeed disrupted the usual understanding of subalternity which allowed her suicide to become a mode of communication and representation (229). Bhubaneswari chose not to be part of a militant group to gain independence and agency (Spivak 2010a, 282).

Bhubaneswari's suicide was intended as a form of resistance to political and gendered oppression, not an act of illicit shame, nor the stereotypical stigma often imposed on women through cultural, sexual, and gendered narratives. However, her erasure directly relates to Bhabha's argument on ambivalence, where dominant cultural discourse constructs marginalized subjects within contradictory spaces that silence their voices and distort the meaning of their experiences (Bhabha 2004, 74–75). For Spivak, this is why the subaltern cannot be heard. She states their realities are overruled by cultural myths, hegemonic structures, and the disappearance of both their bodies and the meanings of their resistance (Spivak 2010a, 282–83). Spivak argues that Bhubaneswari's suicide was not merely a personal tragedy but an epistemic tragedy, where knowledge itself is manipulated and erased through these structures (Spivak 2010c, 230).

Bhabha rejects the simplistic notion of the "melting pot" which is the idea that diverse cultures merge effortlessly into a unified identity. For Bhabha (2004, 312–13), this is a "bankrupt" ideology that ignores how cultural identities remain fragmented, hierarchical, and

marked by colonial power dynamics. He argues that cultural unity is a colonial illusion that denies the ongoing structures of exclusion and difference.

Building on Bhabha's work, Chandra Mohanty extends this argument by exposing how Western feminist scholarship similarly constructs false narratives of unity. In her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," Mohanty (1996, 172) argues that the Western academy uses textual strategies that effectively "codify and appropriate" knowledge by constructing the homogenized figure of the "Third World woman." For Mohanty, this is not limited to white Western scholars. She critiques African and Asian intellectuals as well, arguing that they also produce scholarship on their own middle-class women that generalizes identities and erases the complex realities of women in the Global South (173).

McClintock (1995, 384) acknowledges that Mohanty rightly challenges the Western feminist production of the "Third World woman," but cautions that denouncing all feminisms as imperialist risks erasing the long and diverse history of women's resistance to both local and imperial forms of patriarchy. Mohanty (1996, 173) contends that this homogenization dilutes the lived struggles, labor conditions, and political experiences of marginalized women, further reinforcing their marginalization under the guise of feminist solidarity. Mohanty questions how "postcolonial" can even be defined in this context if political and economic oppression is flattened into generalized categories that erase women's specific historical and cultural positions (173).

Mohanty's goal is to reveal how ethnocentric universalism is produced and appropriated within postcolonial discourse, particularly through Western feminist scholarship. She argues that being classified as "female" already marginalizes women by positioning them within a binary of sexual difference that reinforces patriarchal hierarchies (Mohanty 1996, 175–77). Mohanty

explicitly rejects the notion of a universal "sisterhood" when it erases cultural specificity or invalidates the diverse lived experiences of women across different global contexts (175–77). For Mohanty, such universalizing discourse constructs women primarily as victims under male control, reducing their identities to simplistic categories that obscure historical, political, and cultural complexity (178).

For Bhabha (2004, 51), the necessity of cultural resistance emerges from the "moment of enunciation" where colonized subjects interrupt and challenge binary cultural representations by asserting their own historical and lived experiences. Bhabha contends that meaning is never fixed in enunciation and is then open to reinterpretation which disrupts the hegemonic authority of colonial narratives (51). However, Bhabha clarifies that enunciation does not erase contradiction; rather, it exposes the instability within cultural categories. It allows for creating the space needed for negotiation so hybrid identities can challenge the ideology of cultural difference (41–42). Bhabha states that colonial power operates through deeper mechanisms of fixity, which must operate in repetition in order to make representations about cultural identity (94, 96). These representations must rely on stereotypes, and ambivalence to maintain dominance while appearing normal or natural (107, 131). Bhabha argues that stereotypes and myths rooted in race, gender, and class are reproduced through contradictory, repetitive narratives that reflect both the authority and the fragility of colonial control (110–12).

Gendered Ambiguity

For Bhabha, *ambivalence* becomes a critical concept in this process which reveals how colonial discourse produces both desire and fear, imitation and resistance, all at the same time. He contends that within these contradictions lies a potential space for negotiation and subversion (Bhabha 2004, 122–23). In Bhabha's framework, *mimicry* emerges as a colonial strategy in

which the colonized are compelled to imitate the “manners and morals” of the colonizers; however, this imitation is always partial and constructs ambivalence producing slippage, or excess, which equates to difference (122, 124).

McClintock (1995, 62) critiques Bhabha’s analysis of mimicry, arguing that he does not account for the gendered dynamics or the consequences of mimicry as he delivers. For McClintock, mimicry is not merely a discursive strategy or theoretical ambivalence; it operates as a lived, imposed identity where colonized subjects, particularly women, are forced to “mirror back” distorted images of themselves shaped by colonial and patriarchal power (62). She is concerned that placing too much focus on the ambiguities of mimicry can agree with colonial discourse by ‘normalizing” hierarchies of race, class, and gender (63). In this way, both Bhabha and McClintock explore how myths of cultural unity, hybridity, and mimicry sustain colonial ideologies; however, McClintock needs a deeper gendered consciousness of how these processes develop within domestic and sexual spheres under male dominance (63–64).

Although Bhabha’s approach to theory is more abstract, it allows for a more nuanced examination of deeper complexities within cultural and social norms that generally apply to all populations, colonized and uncolonized. However, Mohanty (1996, 172-73), like McClintock (McClintock 1995, 392-93), critiques Bhabha for failing to directly address how colonial power and global divisions of labor are sustained specifically through the gendered oppression of women. Mohanty (1996, 172–73) argues that feminist and postcolonial scholarship often constructs a homogenous category of the “Third World woman,” which flattens difference and ignores economic and cultural specificities. Similarly, McClintock contends that Bhabha's abstract theories overlook the material realities of gendered subjugation. For her, the “failure” of mimicry is not simply a site of subversive resistance but a “social mask” that reproduces colonial

hierarchies under the illusion of sameness, ultimately undermining the political strategy of representation (McClintock 1995, 62–63).

McClintock (1995, 44) keenly focuses on the invention of gender and the institutionalization of the family as concrete, rather than abstract realities of imperial control. She fully correlates postcolonial violence and trauma to both colonized and uncolonized women who have been subordinated by male domination and placed within what she calls the "organic family" of imperialism (45). In this structure, the cult of domesticity fully functions as a disciplinary unit which controls women's bodies, sexuality, and labor in and outside the family reinforcing imperial, economic, and political power (47). Like Said, she argues that Western science and Darwinism solidified racial and gendered ideologies and hierarchies by masking them as objective truths (37).

McClintock's critique of Bhabha remains an intervention. She addresses how Bhabha's abstractions risk erasing the historical and embodied experiences of women by overlooking the materiality of gendered domesticity (McClintock 1995, 64-66). McClintock carefully unpacks the fetishism embedded in Victorian domestic ideologies by examining the journals of Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick (133). She uses Freudian analysis to expose the eroticized racial and class fantasies that structured imperial patriarchy in which she argues disrupts the social normative consciousness of social, political, and sexual engagement (142–43). McClintock contends that Munby's representation of labor reveals the complexities in imperial domestic gendered work roles (147).

Bhabha uses ambiguity and mimicry to destabilize colonial power, but McClintock (1995, 154) centers on imperialism and patriarchy that sustain and embed themselves by controlling and eroticizing the female body. McClintock argues that there are two types of labor

for women: “dirty” work and “normal” work (154). She looks at how females were overvalued and undervalued depending on their specific type of work which is based on the degree of sexual servantry. McClintock asserts that the life of a Victorian servant functions as an economical, sexual, and domestic benchmark for males, particularly those in heterosexual relationships (142). McClintock argues that imperial powers mined and policed female labor (113–15). She discusses photography as a new technology of imperialism which operated similarly to a universal language. For McClintock, the camera and its effects ordered world histories. McClintock contends that images operated as texts producing “truths” that superseded lived realities (123). As she writes, “Photography became the servant of imperial progress” (125).

McClintock asserts that the camera also universalized the family and became a tool of scientific and social knowledge through disciplines like psychology, criminology, and anthropology. It also provided a system for the classification of people by race, origin, attitude, religion, and character which reduced people to mere anthropological generalizations (McClintock 1995, 124). This visual system of categorization aligns with Said’s (1979, 119-20) arguments about the Orient—that the West relied on generalizations to define the Orient as static, exotic, and inferior.

For McClintock (1995, 115–16), women’s work, specifically mining and domestic duties, destabilized the way gendered work was measured; unfeminine work degraded character and society because women were judged based on the type of clothing they wore which was either feminine or masculine. McClintock (154) asserts that Cullwick’s diaries served as an eyewitness to the ways women’s work was viewed as either “dirty” work or “normal” work in the eyes of the cult of domesticity. For McClintock, women’s work had value, or it did not, because it was economically and racially commodified by the imperial “Family of Man” narrative which was

grounded in Victorian natural science. McClintock states it excluded women from the human realm by classifying them according to race, economy, and sexuality (39, 154). She describes Victorian imperialism as a heterosexual, economic union where women's bodies were both commodified and central to maintaining capitalist control through marriage, labor, and representation. (39, 154).

Psychopathology of Patriarchy Under Colonialism

The literature has shown that myths do not merely exist as abstract ideas. Myths become internalized, producing profound psychological trauma, fragmentation, and intergenerational harm. This section reviews the literature on how violence and trauma manifest itself psychologically and collectively through postcolonial systems; therefore, I will use the psycho-analytical theory of these thinkers to develop thematic patterns to later analyze my data and findings on the ways white-identifying women can experience violence and trauma through these integrated world systems of power which sustain postcolonial violence.

Alienation, Recognition and Inferiority

In his works, Fanon (2008, 66) constructs a "psychopathology of colonialism" which requires more than just analyzing individual and latent forms of psychological harm. He directly views colonialism as a social system that is the producer for neurotic tendencies. For Fanon, psychopathology occurs as a social consequence, not from individual failure (188). Rather than accepting alienation as a universal understanding of human complexities, Fanon develops a historically and politically grounded theory that challenges the very foundations of colonialism and racism. Fanon resists ideological and

universalized interpretations of alienation that never investigate trauma and racialized violence in embodied psychological neurosis (xiv, 190; see also Oliver 2004, 2–3).

For Fanon, the psychological impacts of colonial domination led to debilitating inferiority complexes due to internalized oppression. Fanon (2008, xiv, xv, 93) points out that the colonized are repeatedly represented by colonial authorities as inferior, animalistic, and violent; furthermore, he argues the myth of race was constructed to justify the conflict that has been convoluted to justify the occupation, domination, and violence. Fanon asserts that being Black in a predominantly white world means being excluded from complete humanity. He writes that the Black man "has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man**,**" leading to a feeling of being nonexistent and desiring acknowledgment and comprehension as a black man (xii–xiv, 90). For Fanon, to be black is not to be a man. Fanon interprets this psychological affective disorder as a condition produced by colonialism, a twofold reality of an inferiority complex which entails a social and economic dynamic which "doubles" the internalization of feeling inferior (xiv, xv).

Oliver (2004, 4) expands on Fanon's notion of inferiority and alienation by claiming that the disenfranchised subject is denied meaningful confrontation with the oppressor; therefore, the subjugated individual can't "return to himself." She writes that alienation arises from "a confrontation with nothingness" (4). Oliver emphasizes that oppressed individuals are denied access to subjectivity within a system that denies their humanity (4). Oliver converges with Fanon by recognizing that colonization creates a system where self-worth and identity equate to economic equality in which such oppression justifies and sustains colonialism.

In *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Butler and Athanasiou (2013) deepen this discussion of recognition in their analysis of dispossession. They explore the

conditions in which the marginalized subject aims to gain recognition in a more contemporary context. Butler and Athanasiou argue that recognition often requires marginalized subjects not only to acknowledge dominant norms, but also to comply with systems already marked by significant power imbalances (76–77). Butler uses the example of a woman reporting sexual assault to demonstrate how the law may acknowledge her claim, but only after positioning her as the "illegitimate subject," thereby enforcing her vulnerability within the legal and justice systems (77). This mirrors Bhabha and Spivak's critiques of legal and discursive ambivalence. Both theorists emphasize how the subaltern or colonized subjects are often misrepresented through institutional channels of power and recognition. Butler is not arguing *against* turning to the law, but she states there are risks involved when subordinated individuals consent to normative structures that may ultimately distort or displace their voices (Butler & Athanasiou 2013, 77). Butler and Athanasiou deepen the analysis of recognition by exploring its implications within biopolitical frameworks that emphasize how misrecognition leads to conditions of dispossession and vulnerability. They argue that recognition is institutionally "political" because it is tied to systems of power that determine who is granted subjectivity and whose humanity is denied (76–77). This perspective aligns closely with Fanon's and Oliver's arguments about the inherently political nature of identity and recognition under oppressive conditions.

Gendered Medical, Psychological, and Maternal Oppression

This section specifically investigates how women navigate these broader dynamics of misrecognition and dispossession that ultimately manifest within gendered contexts. My own research explores how white women internalize experiences of shame and alienation stemming directly from systemic erasure, cultural misrepresentation, disability**,** and domestic and political violence (Oliver 2004, chap. 7). By linking these internalized effects explicitly to broader

historical and structural violence, Oliver's analysis offers critical insight into the embodied and psychological trauma experienced by colonized, yet complicit white-identifying women, who navigate the intersecting oppressions of patriarchy and neo-colonial systems of power.

Oliver expands Frantz Fanon's theory of alienation by examining how women in the United States are both gendered and racialized. She argues that women experience a form of internal colonization, which she theorizes as occurring in what she terms "psychic space" (Oliver 2004, 42–43). While Fanon focuses on colonized black men living under direct occupation, Oliver uses his framework to examine how contemporary women and other marginalized populations are still subject to postcolonial forms of trauma. She argues that even noncolonized individuals can still experience postcolonial psychological trauma and violence. This trauma manifests through what she describes as "double alienation," where women experience both gender oppression and cultural misrecognition and exclusion (Fanon 2008; Oliver 2004, 102). Oliver understands Fanon's call for "dis-alienation," which is needed in order to work toward *decolonization* and which aligns with his vision of a new human consciousness that transcends colonial violence and exclusion (Fanon 2008, xi–xv). She adapts this concept to examine not only white complicity, but also how white women have also been marked as "unworthy" or "flawed" subjects within these constructed postcolonial systems (Oliver 2004, 101–3).

Oliver states that these psychological issues do not stem from behavioral problems, but rather from a deeply pathological and biological flawed self-identity (Oliver 2004, 115, 124). For Oliver, this internalization of inferiority is active and visible in the medical and psychology field, where women's physical and emotional conditions are pathologized. She critiques how these coded diagnostic systems reproduce sexual differences and reinforce the idea that women are biologically and emotionally unstable. Furthermore, she contends that women are frequently

labeled as moody, depressed, or even hysterical which keeps women, like all subjugated individuals, under scrutiny and surveillance (101–3).

Oliver's critique aligns with Gayatri Spivak's analysis of epistemic violence and with Butler and Athanasiou's theory of dispossession. Butler and Athanasiou argue that recognition itself is a political act that requires marginalized individuals to submit to the very institutional frameworks that have historically erased or silenced them (Butler & Athanasiou 2013, 76–77). For women, this dynamic is especially visible in the labor market, where medicalized diagnoses and policies regarding emotional and psychological stability can determine access to employment, housing, and credit. Butler posits that public institutions rely on these gendered and racialized assumptions about mental health and productivity that construct producing forms of political and biological stereotype that continues to define women lives as economically unviable and more often unreliable (Butler & Athanasiou 2013, 11–13, 82–90).

Both Oliver and Butler contend that recognition is not neutral; rather, it is embedded in political and economic structures that place individuals into hierarchies of worth and value. Women who are racialized, disabled, or economically vulnerable, often find themselves pathologized or rendered unintelligible within institutional systems that claim to support them. In this way, the legacy of colonial and patriarchal power continues not only through laws and ideologies, but through the medical and bureaucratic mechanisms that shape everyday life.

Oliver argues that racial and patriarchal cultures construct and reinforce pathological stereotypes about women, especially in the context of motherhood. These stereotypes are institutionalized through medicine, psychology, and social frameworks that disproportionately target poor, single, queer, and disabled women along with other marginalized individuals (Oliver 2004, 105). She posits how maternal oppression and scrutiny is pathologized due to complex

structural inequalities but also from other psychological or moral deficiencies that impact women For instance, when children exhibit behavioral or emotional challenges, responsibility is often traced back to the mother's mental health history, class status, or substance use, rather than analyzed as part of traumatic cycles of violence and poverty (106–7).

Oliver notes that literature on maternal mental health more often views these dynamics as social issues associated with histories of oppression and domestic violence. Oliver (2004, 107) converges with Fanon in insisting that depression, when analyzed strictly through a gendered or racialized pathological framework, substantiates dysfunction resulting from individual forms of familial and cultural cycles of trauma that allows the oppression to be universalized.

Shame and Guilt

Oliver examines the roles of shame and guilt, particularly how these effects shape women's psychological and embodied experiences (Oliver 2004, 112-14). She argues that while shame and guilt often operate together, they must be understood as separate dynamics since shame is more deeply internalized and functions at an ontological level (112). She also argues that shame affects females more than males because of gendered oppression and exclusion within patriarchal systems. Oliver argues that shame has been a "widespread observation" by feminist psychologists like Helen Block Lewis, who explicitly links women's depression to shame (112). Oliver articulates that shame is different from guilt, which has often been linked to masculinity and active male agency (112–14). Oliver further contends that shame undermines women's self-worth and identity, whereas guilt is more associated with certain behaviors and actions (115).

Individuals experiencing shame view themselves as morally broken or critically flawed rather than feeling ethically inferior. For Oliver, this results in a deep internalization of self-

contempt and societal contempt (Oliver 2004, 115, 117). Oliver contrasts with Freud's concept of melancholy in which Freud argues that depression results from mourning the loss of another. Oliver argues that within the context of gendered oppression and trauma, a woman's loss is *not* a melancholic loss of *another*, but a full blown out loss of the *self* (121). For Oliver, this deep-rooted sense of shame results in the fragmentation of identity (124).

Collective and Generational Trauma

Colonialism is not only a political and economic system, but also a psychological and physical system that fractures individual and collective consciousness. Fanon (2004, 90) explores how colonization is violent and aggressive, embedding itself onto colonized subjects while also degrading the moral values of the colonizer who dehumanizes the lives of the oppressed. He argues that colonialism creates a condition in which the colonized subject internalizes racial inferiority as a form of self-hatred. For Fanon, it renders them vulnerable and subject to developing deep internal complexes like depression, aggression, and instability that ultimately form their identity through what Fanon describes as a psychopathology of racialization (90).

Building on Fanon, Kelly Oliver extends this analysis by demonstrating how psychic colonization operates not only through race but also through gender and sexuality. She explains that systems of power work to create flawed subjects, particularly women, whose identities are constructed through pathological frameworks that define them as irrational, emotional, and biologically unstable (Oliver 2004, 101–3). According to Oliver, this pathologization becomes internalized; consequently, women come to see themselves through the eyes of these sexualized stereotypical notions of worth and value constructed by postcolonial thought and discourse (112–15). Their perceived instability is surveilled, categorized, and treated as individual failure rather than a product of systemic violence. Shame, once it is deeply embedded, can no longer function

as a temporary emotion; it then becomes an ontological condition that roots itself in one's very being (112–15).

Fanons and Oliver's arguments converge with contemporary trauma scholars like Resmaa Menakem (2017), Nkechinyelum Chioneso (2020), and Richard Schwartz (2021), who describe trauma as a collective and generational condition. Menakem (2017) argues that racialized and collective trauma occurs when people are abandoned, excluded, rejected, or abused mentally, sexually, or physically. He states that bodies respond physically to the recollection of trauma because our emotions are stored in our minds. Consequently, for Menakem, trauma is not just a critical emotional response, but rather the human body's protective response to something it perceives as dangerous (7). He argues that trauma can also be triggered or perceived just by witnessing someone being treated poorly, which can lead to overwhelming feelings of shame, fear, and emotional distress. Menakem coined the term "soul wound" to articulate intergenerational transmission of trauma to the human body that "houses the unhealed dissonance and trauma of our ancestors" today (10). Perpetrator trauma also results collectively and generationally because of a person's participation in oppressive systems like racism and white supremacy; however, what people may not realize is that all forms of oppression lead to violent systems, collective trauma, and gross human atrocities (11).

Fanon's psychoanalytic framework supports this understanding. He explains that colonized subjects experience emotional trauma as repressed suffering which is buried deep in the unconscious mind in order to protect the psyche from overwhelming pain and historical trauma. Fanon (2004, 123) states that this type of psychological exploitation lingers and "dislocates the consciousness," only to reappear in moments of crisis, identity fragmentation, or a perceived social threat. He asserts that psychological regression can materialize at any time,

constituting a danger for the subject (95). Similarly, Oliver argues that for women who have been racialized or economically marginalized, the internalization of inferiority becomes a permanent structure of psychological trauma that becomes reinforced through everyday encounters with medical, legal, and social institutions (Oliver 2004, 115, 124).

Collective psychological wounding is a characterization of postcolonial oppression which does not heal through individual therapy or medical correction alone. Fanon argues that trauma must be understood as a social and systemic condition, a part of postcolonial discourse. Schwartz and Sweezy (2019, 241) describe the enduring impact of "legacy burdens" generational injuries caused by racism, misogyny, and economic violence that split communities and corrode trust. The psychological weight of colonialism is sustained through these interlocking systems, which continue to define who is worthy of recognition and who is rendered invisible.

Fanon reminds us that the trauma of colonialism does not only belong to the oppressed, but also to the mind of the oppressor. This is echoed by Menakem's (2017, 11) work on perpetrator trauma, which shows how participation in systems of domination inflicts spiritual and emotional harm on those who benefit from them. In this way, the colonizer and colonized are caught in a shared, though radically unequal, cycle of psychic distortion. Healing, therefore, must be collective, involving both acknowledgement of harm and a willingness to participate in radical forms of relational repair (Menakem 2017, 11-20; Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 240).

Ultimately, the psychopathology of colonialism cannot be understood without acknowledging its collective, generational, and embodied dimensions. Fanon, Oliver, and contemporary trauma theorists all point to the ways trauma becomes structured into identity itself. But they also suggest that recovery is possible; however, it must resist the systems that

produced the trauma, but it must be through collective recognition and the reconstitution of the self in relation to others and to history.

Recognition is never just a political or legal process; it also functions psychologically and physically. Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 2–4, 21–24) describe dispossession not only as the material loss of land, rights, or political standing, but also as a loss of self, a fracturing of subjectivity that occurs when a person is misrecognized, rendered unintelligible, or denied legitimacy within dominant social frameworks. They argue that the psychological injury is not a personal experience but a social and structural one: "To be dispossessed by norms is to become a subject who is fundamentally dependent on the very terms that injure" (4).

For Butler and Athanasiou, misrecognition becomes a form of psychological violence and trauma. It produces vulnerability not just by denying material resources or legal recourse, but by robbing individuals of symbolic legibility, forcing them to rely on the very systems that negate their personhood in order to survive.

Economic Exploitation

Misrecognition and psychological trauma align with my own research, where white-identifying women in the United States are legally silenced or politically erased through these colonial systems already marked by significant power imbalances. These systems actually require subjugated women to seek protection or justice from structures that simultaneously discredit them; again, aligning with my own research and arguments on how white-identifying women suffer from psychopathologies directly related to patriarchy under colonialism. It builds upon Fanon's earlier work, which foregrounded recognition as a racialized ontological struggle between colonized and uncolonized individuals. In this research, I include and focus on gender as part of this colonial contest. Butler and Athanasiou emphasize that even within liberal

democracies, subjects must psychologically internalize hegemonic norms in order to be seen, making survival contingent upon the very norms that disqualify and pathologize them (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 76–79). Now I will show how institutional violence naturally extends into economic exploitation, manifesting clearly through gendered labor and reproductive control.

The collective trauma and violence of colonialism show how systems of domination under patriarchy are embedded in structures of society in the modern world, particularly for women. These injuries manifest as shame, alienation, depression, and misrecognition which are not isolated situations or coincidences; rather, they are violent systems of oppression which are reinforced and sustained by economic subjugation, reproductive regulation, consumerism, and the ongoing exploitation of women's labor and bodies. This section explores the work of Mies, Shiva**,** Spivak, McClintock, and Mohanty. This work shows how women's bodies and labor are central to the reproduction of postcolonial power and relevant to my own experience of exploitation. This analysis will then set the foundation for my concluding chapter, which considers how ecofeminism offers a pathway toward healing, resistance, and the reclamation of agency across both human and ecological systems.

Sustaining Disordered Gendered Roles

In her analysis, McClintock (1995, 354) presents Fanon's argument that colonizers re-ordered labor production and gendered domestic roles to "conquer" women who only were used to circumvent power from men to lock women in the myth and colonial ideology of the "nation" of family. McClintock refers to this as the militarization of women which she states is a colonial strategy to reinforce national identity (359–60). She describes this as a form of alienation being categorized under what she calls a "category of nature" which naturalizes gendered and

racialized social differences, so they appear normal and fixed rather than strategic political moves (358–59).

McClintock also insists that nationalism and "technologies of violence" operate by constructing family identity that reinforces binary hierarchies. For McClintock (1995, 358–60), the guise of the national family normalizes and naturalizes populations that regulate and sustain power for European colonizers. McClintock posits that women's identities are directly associated through marriage, making them seem visible to men by playing this role (357). She argues that this colonial strategy naturalized and laid out gendered roles that were aligned with motherhood, reproduction, and domesticity (358–59).

In her analysis, McClintock (1995, 360) also illuminates Fanon's recognition of the nationalization of the family as an operative dimension of colonial oppression. She states that Fanon rejects any Western notion of nationalism and that he argues the structure of the family parallels the structure of the nation. McClintock claims Fanon states it is not because the family is political, but rather that colonialism projects nationalism and its authority onto the family unit (360). Fanon (2008, 120–21) explains that the European family reflects on and reinforces one another. For the white European child, growing up in a socially recognized "normal" family, supports psychological development. But for the Black child, even within a loving family, exposure to colonial and racialized trauma leads to psychic fragmentation and long-term psychopathological effects (122–23*).* Fanon states that these emotional traumas are pushed deep into the unconscious as a means of psychological survival. However, they do not disappear; consequently, they remain embedded in the psyche until they reemerge, often described as psychological and generational trauma (122–23).

Commodification of Women's Bodies and Labor

In their book, *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993, 2) argue that the narrow mindset of capitalist-patriarchy continues to illustrate the "difference" of others in order to set the imperatives that control the labor and production market. For Shiva, the reductionist worldview devolves knowledge to a binary form of value or non-value, which divides nature and marginalized populations, especially women (24). Capital accumulation becomes the goal for capitalist patriarchy and a deepening crisis in the modern industrial world (2–3). "Consumerist militarism" is a very competitive labor and production operation sustained by imperial capitalist economies that exploit populations for profit (Brueggemann 2012, 4). Spivak (2010a, 285) converges with the idea of capitalist militance, the constitutive power behind capitalism and the international division of labor that silences the voices of subaltern women.

Mies and Shiva also contend that capitalist and patriarchal systems derive power by highlighting and exploiting the constructed differences of the subordinate "Other," particularly women and the natural world. They argue that this type of domination dehumanizes and commodifies women and nature through these extractive and exploitative practices through labor (Mies and Shiva 1993, 39). Like Spivak, Mies and Shiva call for a new feminist discourse, one that begins from an equal epistemic foundation rather than from the power structures that have been embedded in colonialism that continue to replicate this systemic inequality in the labor force. Spivak (1999, 239, 287) expands this critique in her analysis of the international division of labor, which she describes as a poststructuralist political formation that renders working-class and subaltern women structurally silent.

McClintock and Spivak both examine how the gendered laboring body is marked by its abjection. In *Imperial Leather,* McClintock (1995, 154–56) symbolically theorizes how class,

gender, and women's bodies and labor were commodified and objectified. She articulates how dirt, fetish, or epistemic erasure reveals how women's work is policed, eroticized, and scrutinized under capitalism (152–54). McClintock metaphorically sees "dirt" not simply as filth or waste, but as a cultural symbol of transgression which in Victorian culture spread out and crossed social, sexual, and cultural boundaries (152, 153). For McClintock, money, work, and sex are all interrelated with the "cult" of empire reinforcing imperial domination through the division of male over female, paid work versus unpaid work, and the separation, classification, racialization, and the gendering of labor (144, 154). Dirt was just leftover matter with no value, symbolically signifying lower class or unpaid labor, work often carried out by women or colonized individuals (153). McClintock writes,

> Dirt is what is left over after exchange value has been extracted. In Victorian culture, the bodily relationship to dirt expressed a social relation to labor. . . . Dirt is the counterpart of the commodity; something is dirty precisely *because* it is void of commercial value, or because it transgresses the "normal" commercial market. Dirt is by definition useless, because it is that which belongs outside the commodity market. (153–54)

Both theorists show how patriarchy and capitalism depend on women's devalued work, whether in the Victorian home or the neocolonial work factory.

Spivak's theory of abjection converges with McClintock's, particularly in how the subaltern woman is disposable in both epistemic and economic systems. Spivak (2010a, 239; 2009, 87) argues that women's labor becomes invisible through colonial and patriarchal discourse, especially under the "logic of the old colony" that continues to regulate who is granted value and voice. Similarly, Mohanty argues that global labor systems frame Third World women as homogenized groups of women whose work is undervalued or entirely excluded. She states that these women are constructed through Western feminist thought that silences them, simultaneously reinforcing economic control (Mohanty 1996, 188–89). Together, these thinkers

show how racialized, gendered labor is not only economically exploited, but *symbolically* devalued through structures that mark bodies, women's bodies, as dirty, excessive, or out of place.

Mohanty (1996, 175) insists on using the term "Third World women" because she argues that women should reclaim a political category of representation rather than geographical representation which emphasizes a false solidarity across struggles against colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Mohanty ultimately rejects any notion of homogenizing any group of women together who suffer from oppression because it doubly jeopardizes the well-being of women when they are seen as a unit of oppression (175–76, 183). For Mohanty, this includes presuming that all Third World women have the same needs and interests, because they do not. She states that their needs are different based on developmental policies that vary in specific regions. They also undergo different processes based on race, class, and religion (183). Accordingly, Mohanty analyzes the work of Maria Mies in her book, *The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market* (183). For Mohanty, a look of gendered labor and exploitation must be examined within the original contexts that reveal how global capitalism and colonial legacies shape women's experiences. She argues that it must be studied according to the complex structures and systems in a particular industry or region in order to understand the full impact on women locally, provincially, and nationally (184).

For example, Mies argues that during the Green Revolution in India, women's work continued. Nevertheless, much of it was labeled as *housework*, which is unpaid work and excluded from formal labor studies such as the Committee on the Status of Women in India (Mies 2012, 24–26). For Mies, many women who were *once* counted as wage-earning members of the labor force were erased from records, contributing to further socio-economic oppression

that reinforced patriarchal and sexist normatives (24). Mies explains that rural women in certain locations continued to engage in agricultural work for their families and communities survival; however, the commercialization of agriculture displaced women because of the patriarchal ideology of labor and ownership which only proletarianized women and pushed them further into poverty (27–28; Mies and Shiva 1993, 73–75). This aligns with McClintock's argument on gendered work which either has economic value or does not.

Mies (2012, 157–59) posits that lace making was a viable form of income for women, but due to the reclassification of women's labor by merchants and exporters, women did not receive wages for their work even though it was a globally exported and profitable business. Although Mies concludes that the agricultural subsistence problem was not directly relevant to the issues the lace makers of Narsapur had, it revealed the wider implications of the problems women faced, the exploitation and devaluation of women's labor and the enrichment of capitalist expansions at their expense and demise (174–75). Mies argues that women, being constantly pushed to the margins, had to rely on "sheer survival work" whereas men were able to move up and economically benefit and profit by commingling with male trade and export agents (176–77). McClintock's work on the cult of domesticity merges with Mies arguments on "housewifisation" because women are denied the means to build independent livelihoods and make "super profits" from being lace makers and establishing a successful business (177–78). For Mies, this not only reinforces women's dependence on men for financial support, but also builds divisions among women that set them apart by race, class, geographical location, and competition.

Assigning women's work to the home with no economic value, shows how imperial labor and political strategies rely on institutionalized gendered and racialized boundaries that divide

women (McClintock 1995, 131, 148–49). McClintock's readings of a British working-class woman's diary show how women engaged in "dirty work and servitude" as a coping mechanism for being in the midst of imperial order in which women were denied agency and working-class power (159). For Cullwick, class recognition was much more important to her than being recognized for her gender. This is because being a wife was considered valueless when compared to having "working class value" (159). Like the lace makers of Narsapur, the women considered themselves self-sufficient entrepreneurs, having the ability to manage a business *and* take care of a family (Mies 2012, 159). These specific frameworks reveal how the erasure of women's productive labor is not just an isolated incident, but part of a larger neocolonial system that construes women's labor as both needed, but valueless.

McClintock's (1995, 169) work on women's servantry, invisibility, and "Victorian" housewifisation reveals how white women were sexualized, devalued, and historically naturalized in the midst of the colonial period. Like Mies, McClintock's analysis offers a glimpse into working-class women's efforts to negotiate and rationalize their value as viable producers, even as imperial strategies of control confined their bodies and labor to the private sphere, denying them recognition as producers and breadwinners (McClintock 1995, 169; Mies 2012, 159).

Mies critique on the production value of lace making by women is important for my own research to analyze if my title and position within the community, within the labor force, and within my own family was reclassified. Additionally, Mies's research will help determine if the value of my own work changed, and who had the power to make that decision.

Exploitative Labor Practices

Mies (2012, 158) conducted household surveys to understand how lace makers

interpreted their own labor experiences. Even though they worked long, hard hours, the women felt that only upper-class groups were making profits. Many attributed this to numbers of foreign business agents and exporters who were making large profits through what they described as a "mysterious" process. They linked the disparity between their profit margins to a lack of access to loans for working capital which made them less competitive in business (158–59).

According to Mies, a continued "housewife ideology," resulted in lace makers not being recognized as a viable part of the workforce. Patriarchal norms reinforced the devaluation of women who worked from home, who internalized their inferiority (Mies 2012, 160). Many respondents reported that husbands continued to dominate household power structures while contributing little to the household. The women felt that they had no control over resources or their growing concerns to these work-related situations (160). Additionally, the lace makers paid high fees to political groups and organizers that they felt were unnecessary (161).

Mies (2012, 162) argues that the lace makers were exploited by capitalists within a global system of structural violence. She contends that exporters organized a governing association that limited transparency in the lace industry and authored its own standards. They leveraged all their *own* interests, not the interests of home-based women whose labor was classified as unpaid "housework" (162). She argues that the industry lacked an oversight committee that could intervene for the women and address their concerns (162–63). According to Mies, the Lace Exporters' Association worked in tandem with the quality-marking officer, who was aligned with *multiple* regulatory agencies that held the power. These powers in charge circulated scanty and biased information about the lace trade, which gave exporters the advantage while disadvantaging unpaid, home-based lace makers (163–64).

Dispossession and Disadvantage

Butler and Athanasiou expand this concept of erasure and disadvantage by theorizing dispossession and disadvantage in contemporary concepts that look beyond developmental policy. They show how women are divided and are further silenced through distinctions that normalize certain *perceptions* of law and regulations. For example, they argue that ambiguous laws can coerce women to accept forms of legal representation that go against ethical and moral principles (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 91). They discuss how power becomes monopolized through normative structures which determine who should be recognized and who not be (88). They argue that all forms of exploitation are self-destructive especially for women whose bodies have been pathologized and historically objectified and commodified, an argument that resonates with the critiques of Spivak, McClintock, Mohanty, and Mies (88).

Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 88–91, 92) further argue that dispossession is not only an individual experience but also a social and relational one that is tied to the "structural dependencies" that societies either confront or suppress. Their critique of "normative ontologies" exposes how systems of gender and sexism determine which bodies are granted visibility and value (92–94). This analysis converges with McClintock's (1995, 97) argument in *Imperial Leather*, where she asserts that women's bodies under empire were treated as disposable and assigned value or no value depending on their role within colonial power structures.

These overlapping frameworks of dispossession, colonial labor divisions, and capitalist exploitation show how postcolonial strategies and existing structures of patriarchal power are sustained through women, their work, and their bodies, rendering them invisible. Patriarchal heteronormative sexuality determines who gets access to knowledge and resources since economic desire is not isolated from personal aspects or the identity of the "other" (Althaus-Reid

2000, 166). As women are silenced through these postcolonial structures and cultural dynamics, women's physical, reproductive, and ecological ties to well-being will be examined in the next section.

Ecofeminism

Science, Exploitation, Technology, and Reproductive Control

Mies and Shiva are concerned with the appropriation of women's labor under capitalist patriarchy; however, their concern goes beyond economic oppression which includes the deeper intrepid biopolitical, spiritual, and ecological consequences of these imperial systems. They argue that capitalist patriarchy does not simply exploit labor but actually transforms difference into hierarchy which produces systemic inequality and enables the uneven distribution of resources, wealth, and power (Mies and Shiva 1993, 2). This logic reinforces the subjugation of both women and nature, treating both as resources to be managed, extracted, or controlled for the sake of profit and production. Since women have the potential to nurture and bring forth new life from a seed, women *and* nature are subordinate to men (Johnson 2014, 126).

Carolyn Merchant, in "The Scientific Revolution and *The Death of Nature*" and "Secrets of Nature: The Bacon Debates Revisited," presents a path of historical consciousness about women and nature that converges with Mies and Shiva's work on science and violence to women. Merchant contends that science, during the Scientific Revolution, functioned not as a natural process of scientific advancements, but as more of an ideology that supported the subjugation of both nature and women. She argues that women's reproductive roles were integrated with natural female processes (Merchant 2008, 150; 2006, 518). This made females and their bodies subject to technological control, binding female bodies to the mechanistic worldview of scientific rationalism (2006, 515). For Merchant, the reductionism of nature

parallels the reduction of women's reproductive capacity when seen as an economic and technological advancement.

Merchant also analyzes the theological and mythological underpinnings of this scientific discourse, particularly through Francis Bacon's metaphorical use of nature as a female figure to be interrogated, penetrated, and subdued. Bacon, in this case, rooted his theology in the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve (Merchant 2008, 150). Merchant asserts that Bacon's scientific method drew heavily on religious and patriarchal imagery, portraying man's salvation as dependent on his conquest of nature. This narrative not only legitimized male control over the natural world but symbolically feminized nature as wild, unknowable, and in need of domination (Merchant 2008, 150; 2006, 518).

Subjugation of women and nature resonates with Bhabha and Said's postcolonial theories who similarly argue that repetition, stereotype, and symbolic representation are central to systems of domination. Like Said's notion of the "Orient" as a feminized space of mystery and Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry and ambivalence, Merchant (2008, 152) shows how early science relied on repetitive and gendered stereotypes that implied women and nature was irrational, dangerous, and needed to be controlled. The work of Mies, Shiva, and Merchant illuminates how the ideological foundations of modern science, capitalist patriarchy, and colonialism converge in their theories on reductionism in which women's labor, bodies and diverse forms of knowledge are devalued, essentialized, and ultimately rendered exploitable.

Merchant (2008, 155) claims Francis Bacon's depictions of the dissection of woman's bodies and nature was embedded in religious and gendered imagery in which he argued could lead to a "discovery" of the lost knowledge from Adam and Eve's fall of grace. During the Renaissance, Merchant asserts that women were believed to know "secrets of nature" due to their

reproductive anatomy. Merchant claims that Bacon's interest in "nature's secrets" was correlated with the human body, particularly the female body.

In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon (2010, 179) writes,

> In the inquiry which is made by anatomy, I find much deficience: for they inquire of the parts, and their substances, figures, and collocations; but they inquire not of the diversities of the parts, the secrecies of the passages, and the seats or nestlings of the humours.

Merchant describes a scientific era where female bodies were put on display as a scientific natural setting in which the observer could see the dissection of the human female womb (Merchant 2008, 159).

Reductionism: Science, Patriarchy, and Matriarchy

For Mies and Shiva (1993, 3), ecological oppression is inseparable from reproductive oppression, as both reflect the deterioration of Mother Earth and the exploitation of women's bodies. They argue that ecology and women function together, politically, culturally, ethically, and spiritually. They state that under colonial and capitalist systems, renewable resources are something to be dominated or depleted (3, 16). For them, ecofeminism is not merely a framework but a moral compass that recognizes the connection between science, and life-sustaining relationships.

As colonization advanced, the relational bonds between mother and child, humanity and nature, were violently severed (Mies and Shiva 1993, 2–3, 17). Shiva denounces the reductionist logic of capitalist patriarchy, which frames ecosystems and women's labor as interchangeable, divisible into monetized units. For Shiva, the science of reductionism and regeneration presents itself as a universally applicable system of knowledge. She contends that this model does not make objective conclusions about life or creation, even though it is widely accepted by the world as truth (22). Shiva argues that reductionism and regeneration is a universalized epistemology

that oversimplifies complex dynamics between women, earth, and economics; therefore, she critically argues that "value free" logic is what sustains economic and reproductive oppression over women and their bodies (22). Shiva contends that the reductionist model simplifies complex systems to a single component; therefore, ecofeminist theory rejects the model of Western modernity during the industrial and scientific revolution which emerged as a dominant driving force. It masqueraded itself as a legitimate form of knowledge despite its oversimplification of multifaceted systems that reduce ecosystems to single uniform components (22).

This aligns with Gerda Lerner's (1986, 27–28) analysis in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, where she argues that women's caregiving capacities were not only devalued but actively appropriated by early patriarchal and imperial systems to build male moral authority. Women became symbolically responsible for the survival of the species, while men institutionalized dominance through militarized, legal, and economic structures (18, 22). For Lerner, the historical subordination of women is not a byproduct of development, it is foundational to how male-dominated institutions function. In *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992, 140) argues that these patriarchal patterns perpetuate animosity toward women because of their reproduction potential, or being "birth givers." This means that Reuther connects the marginalization of women, particularly in their function as life-bearers, with the devaluation of limited but "renewable" life. Ruether also compares women's bodies to natural resources and the ecological cycles in nature. She contends that disrespect or contempt for the natural world reflects how societies sometimes downplay or ignore the fact that women are able to bear children (140–41).

Reuther also converges with Lerner's (1986, 43) argument, noting that pre-patriarchal societies organized themselves around matricentric values where women's social and agricultural

roles were part of their everyday lives. However, the inability to integrate men into these structures without subordinating women led to resentment and eventually the rise of patriarchal systems (Ruether 1992, 167–69). This connects to Mies and Shiva's argument that women's expertise in food production and subsistence agriculture was stripped of economic value under capitalist systems. Women's labor was reclassified as domestic "housework," falling outside the boundaries of recognized production, even though it sustained entire communities (Mies and Shiva 1993, 168).

Biodiversity: The Seed of Life

Shiva teaches that women's work is based on cultivating and conserving biodiversity which is the antithesis of a patriarchal notion of biodiversity. To nourish and nurture seeds and plants takes preparation, knowledge, and skill which comes from the work and experience of women which is discounted in a patriarchal capitalist matrix (Mies and Shiva 1993, 165). Knowledge about seed germination, soil and climate conditions, and the ability to harvest food is crucial to agriculture, but also crucial to sustaining the integrity of life (167). Ruether's (1992, 105, 169) work converges with Mies and Shiva's (1993, 170–72) argument by highlighting how spiritual traditions and consumerist militarism alike have rendered women's bodies and labor disposable.

Lerner further supports these ecofeminist critiques by examining how the international division of labor has evolved to institutionalize gendered inequalities. She argues that women's employment has historically been limited to careers compatible with caregiving and reproduction, thereby reinforcing patriarchal structures within labor markets (Lerner 1986, 42–43). She argues that early on, males in the pursuit of resources and progress, laid the groundwork for systemic gendered inequality (43). Lerner also contends that women were crucial to the

gathering and production of food which required them to have great skills and knowledge of seeds, plants, and trees. Furthermore, women needed to understand the biodiversity of agriculture and the implications it had for their families, future ecological sustainment and cycles, and what this meant spiritually for them and their families (Lerner 1986, 43; Mies and Shiva 1993, 168–69).

Shiva argues that viewing seeds and women's bodies as centers of regenerative power is a matter of concern and she stresses that in view of capitalist patriarchy, it symbolically represents the last "colonies" for imperial powers (Mies and Shiva 1993, 25). Shiva emphasizes that undervaluing women's contributions has been a recurring theme throughout world history. Moreover, she notes that creating a separation often leads to a sense of alienation, which subsequently starts to imply ownership over women and nature's contributions (25). She states that women's labor and epistemology have been negated to the point where it overlaps with reproductive technologies (27).

Shiva maintains that the power shift rapidly changes and moves from being with the women to being with the man (Mies and Shiva 1993, 27). Shiva discusses the colonization of the seed that parallels the colonization of women's bodies (27). She states that when labor becomes "non-labor "and when value becomes "non-value" we must recognize that this system has negative implications (32). First, it denies the contributions of those who appropriated and contributed to labor and value. Second, by changing the language or semiotic meaning of words and images, it constructs other meanings. For instance, using the word appropriation and then changing the word to "development and improvement" extinguishes all claims of ownership and agency because it is now a "new improved version of the subject" therefore, it is conceptually making something new (32). Finally, categorizing labor as a part of nature implies communal

ownership, with no specific claim of individual rights or ownership. Shiva elaborates on this by highlighting the instance of indigenous people being dispossessed of their land, which was justified on the grounds that the land was not being actively cultivated or 'in use' for production (32). Shiva argues that the appropriation of regenerative resources essential for life's renewal represents the most severe ecological crisis brought about by patriarchal science and technology. She suggests that this interference disrupts the natural progression and continuity of life, along with its ability to sustain itself (33).

Biodiversity and the Sacred

In "Talk About the Weather: The Greening of Eschatology," Catherine Keller (1993, 31) argues that dualist thinking separates and divides women, culture, and nature; therefore, she converges with Mies and Shiva's argument that capitalist patriarchy and consumerism only see profits, not the viable contributions of women who value the reciprocal relationship between earth and all creation. Like Shiva, Keller also identifies the spiritual and sacred connections between humanity and all creation. She argues that this complementarity is fixed by our communal struggle for survival and salvation (32). Keller uses the weather as a metaphor for the ecological crisis we are in. Keller warns that unexpected, catastrophic storms and serious climate disasters that we witness today may be symptoms of a sick planet due to continued exploitation of the environment (32).

Like Shiva, Keller argues that there are spiritual consequences for violating the earth. Keller (1993, 31–32) insists that all of us need to take ethical and moral responsibility for the destruction of the earth, paying attention to the ecological consequences along with the eschatological consequences for not caring for our common home. Keller also maintains that women are radically compared to the weather, being seen as unpredictable, harsh, and

threatening. She argues that an ecological imbalance parallels gender imbalance, where women's bodies and nature are simultaneously undervalued and endangered (35).

Mies, Shiva, and Keller all are concerned about women being falsely linked as the "second sex," due to patriarchal systems that have assigned value based on productivity and dominance (Mies and Shiva 1993, 164). For them, patriarchy does not recognize the value found in biodiversity and it seeks to exploit both women and nature for economic gain (165, 169). Keller (1993, 42) argues that "'man's conquest of nature' begins at home." She argues that patriarchal domination of nature mirrors the subjugation of women. She warns that if Western ideologies continue to control and exploit nature, male consciousness will remain locked in what she terms "a gendered dualism" that justifies the subjugation and dominance of women (42). Keller refers to this gendered dualism as a "man-made apocalypse," in which women and nature are positioned on opposite sides of a binary fence (41). This aligns with Mies and Shiva's critiques of dualism, although they frame the issue more through the lens of binary distinctions such as nature/culture, male/female, and production/reproduction. Keller also critiques Christian doctrine, asserting that it helped demarcate women as subordinate thus contributing to the ecological crisis by reinforcing the secularization and commodification of the global capitalist market. For Keller, colonization and the domination of the planet have been falsely equated with "progress" (41–42). She also maintains that men associate nature with women, who are viewed as "alternately enchanting and frightening, nurturing and withholding, rhythmic and capricious, moody and unstable" (31). This metaphorical feminization of the earth reinforces systems of control and surveillance over both women's bodies and ecological systems (Mies and Shiva 1993, 56, 58).

Reproduction and the Sacred

Mies also shows the connections between genetic engineering and reproduction technologies that fall to a new level of ethical and moral concern. Mies states that these scientific advances only justify a new model of sustained growth to build wealth and to maintain control of female bodies (Mies and Shiva 1993, 175). The female body is now seen as a source of major profit because now science can use women to control the creative process of reproduction (186). This denies women of their reproductive identity and reciprocity to nature by again subordinating women to capitalist patriarchy coerced by biased sexism. Mies argues that this entire reproductive development is objectified and controlled by science and medical teams which cut off the natural interaction between the mother and her child (186). These new reproductive procedures implore the women to be cut off from her natural essence; she is no longer an object but rather an arrangement of consecutive objects which subjects the woman to be "sold, hired, or thrown away like ova not used for experiments or artificial insemination (186).

Elizabeth A. Johnson, a Catholic reconstructive feminist and Sister of St. Joseph, argues that a forged ideology of God, creation, and salvation is the problem. The communal vision of salvation never should have been a pyramid of human privilege and the right to dominate, but rather a reciprocal relationship between humanity and the rest of creation including the earth (Johnson 2018, 204). Johnson has greatly contributed to the theology of the church, especially in her work to deconstruct unjust social structures that oppress women. In *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse,* Johnson's (1992, 6) central question to ask is: "What is the right way to speak about God in the face of women's newly cherished human dignity and equality?"

Johnson structures her argument using classical theology from scripture; however, she inserts feminine metaphors and symbols to guide how words designate their meaning and function. Johnson (1992, 4) argues that using patriarchal language to speak about God results in unjust social structures for women because *how* "the symbol functions" becomes the reality and general consensus for truth in a faith community. When women sit from the margins being historically subordinated by gender and allow their fundamental dignity to be reduced to the myth of inequality, it violates the fundamental core of being human. Johnson rejects any exclusive, patriarchal, or literal speech about God because it internalizes fundamental *misinterpretations* of scripture that dismisses the divine mystery and attributes of God and human creation (23, 36). In order to deconstruct androcentric views of God that correlate to ecofeminism, we must dismantle false theologies by acknowledging that God is transcendental and unconstrained in his pure essence as the Ultimate source of life and truth (Johnson 1992, 165, 239; 2018, 186, 201).

Ruether (1992, 232) correlates with Johnson's argument by further stating that while civilizations and communities change, God's character and the contents of sacred scriptures remain constant. Both scholars argue that the production of language and epistemologies reveals that not all historical information and representations are found in texts; some histories have been created, eliminated, or lost because of the marginalization of particular populations. Furthermore, the technological and biological advances in science have significantly challenged sexist and racist interpretations of human anthropology which were influential in shaping Christian doctrine (Ruether 1992, 217–18; Johnson 1992, 36, 49, 70). These scientific developments have disrupted established beliefs and theories about human nature that were grounded in discriminatory perspectives.

White women were used to justify and sustain colonization. Gendered roles and ideology still function in the United States and globally today because being a female is still central to empire *and* spirituality. In this review, I have drawn from multiple interdisciplinary fields that have shown how postcolonial and eco-feminist theory and theology provides essential insights into how systems of power and violence continue to shape the lives of white-identifying women, psychologically and physically through legal, domestic, economic, political, and religious structures. Through this analysis of ecological and reproductive exploitation, I show how a theological and eco-feminist consciousness allows for resistance to this violence. This practical theological praxis emerges from these intersections of suffering and sacredness, rooted in ecofeminist traditions and contemplative practice. Insights from ecofeminist spirituality also emerge from my own embodied experiences of trauma, loss, silencing, and resistance as a white-identifying woman in the United States. In the next chapter, I turn to the data from my autoethnographic research correlating my own embodied experience and reflexive storytelling to document and show the systems that resonate with postcolonial theory and the systems that attempted to erase me; and how eco-feminist theory and theology helped me to resist and heal.

Chapter 4: Autoethnographic Research—Nancy Sagona, Ballasting Railway Contractor

On Rivers

On Rivers is not just an average river tubing story that went wrong. It is a story about an intense fight for survival. It is also a story about being face to face with a punishing reality that some of us, or all of us could die. The realization of this kind of knowing is indescribably paralytic. *There are no do-overs*. The story also was not just about what went on in the river this particular day. The story was a precursor to a future life event that strongly resonates more starkly against the backdrop of later struggles in my life. My life, much like the river that day, has been a series of calm stretches abruptly disrupted by churning turmoil.

My sister Sally and I decided to take our kids on a trip to get out of the blazing triple-digit temperatures in Texas in 2001. My three-year-old son, thirteen-year-old daughter, and Sally's five-year-old son thought it would be fun to tube down the Virgin River in Zion National Park. I also needed a few days to talk with my children in a safe space about a dire traumatic crisis that I was currently experiencing in my career as a railway ballasting contractor. My goal was to redirect my children's fragile but not yet broken emotional state; *or so I thought*. The locals say that on any given day, the river is notoriously very shallow and has a peaceful lazy current. It is a place where kids, dogs, and people of all ages go, just to hang out. They pack their coolers with goodies and anchor them to their floats. Some people hang out on the side of the river and lounge in the inch deep water enjoying the eager and bright sun. Others take the hour journey and float down the lazy river.

After arriving in Zion, we decided to start the morning with an easy hike on a beginner trail at the Narrows. In reality, it was not a beginner trail. It was actually a handicap-accessible trail that has concrete paths, handrails, and is on the main streets in Zion for easy emergency

access for those that may need urgent medical care. I have been permanently disabled since I was thirty years old even though I look 'normal' to most people. At sixteen, I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy after suffering full cardiac arrest when I was driving to work one day. A year later, I was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) which ravaged most of my main organs, joints, and senses. One day, I woke up completely deaf in my right ear. The diagnosis was sensorineural hearing loss, or sudden nerve deafness associated with vestibular neuritis, vertigo, tinnitus, so I am unable to walk on uneven terrains, go up steps, escalators, or balance myself on bridges, ledges, or heights due to this severe balance disorder.

After the brief hike, we enjoyed a hearty breakfast, then headed to the river's entry point which appeared deceptively tranquil. The water was whispering softly over the rocks, the river's voice was inviting, so we fitted our life vests and listened to the brief safety instructions before the tour bus driver left to meet us at the river's pick-up point which was roughly an hour down the river. We were oblivious to the drama that lay ahead. As we pushed off from the bank, we heard the echoes of our laughter bounce off the canyons that surrounded us. The air was still, the current lazy. We were a really happy flotilla of five bright orange tubes gliding on barely a foot of clear blue water. The river was so clear we could see scores of crayfish paddling about. But within minutes, the sky darkened—a foreboding overture to absolute chaos.

Without warning, a flash flood bore down on us, transforming the river from a gentle stream into a monstrous force. The water, swollen and furious, surged around us, muddy and opaque rapidly filling with all sorts of debris. My daughter and I held our tubes firmly together, but Sally and our two sons were swept out in what looked like a torrent bath of brown raging water that roared with the ferocity of a thousand trains. Panic gripped my daughter, and we lost sight of them as their tubes spun wildly in the rapids. The river was no longer a benign

companion, but a brutal adversary, now hurling my daughter and I against rocks. I could no longer see my son, or Sally and her son. I was in a complete panic, devastated as my daughter and I were being slammed into the river's craggy rock walls. We were slapped by large tree limbs and branches as we spun into our own abyss of brown muddy water that was rising as each second passed. The force was unimaginable, the water's roar frightening. My heart raced; I couldn't sustain myself in the water. Every second was a battle, a desperate fight against the pull of the current.

Thoughts of life and death flashed with a clarity that was both terrifying and vivid. Who would survive? How would we survive? How did we get caught up in this hellish nightmare? My physical strength completely waned, but it was then that my daughter's courage shone us through. She paddled fiercely, her young arms battling the relentless water, holding me and herself above water, her spirit undeterred. After both of us were knocked off our rafts, we sank to the bottom and realized the water was at least fifteen feet high by this point. We were shocked by how fast the water rose. I wasn't strong enough to get back on the raft. My daughter somehow pulled me up onto the float. Then, there came the calm. We didn't even have enough time to process this brief period of calm before it started to rage once again. The entire ride down the river was like this- fast and deadly, then came the moments of calm and normalcy. I literally could not breathe. Where was my son? Where was Sally and her son? Were they alive? Terror struck me like I had never known before.

My daughter and I were fervently fighting and praying, but the active situation required our undivided cognitive attention. We needed to remain afloat, being above the water. We needed to avoid being hit by rocks, branches, debris, and moving uprooted trees. Both of us knew that if my daughter couldn't hold on to both of our floats, I would be gone. As we were

blasting down the river, we finally spotted my son, Sally, and her son. We rejoiced. As we got closer, we noticed that she was holding on to a tree branch for dear life, but my son was going under the water as it was rising up. My daughter and I knew they all would drown in minutes if she did not let go of the branch. There was no time for sadness. Loudly, like sergeants, we ordered her to let go of the branch. She felt the urgency in our voices. We knew she was afraid to let go of that branch, for it was the only hope to cling to. We were all face to face with a punishing reality that some of us, or all of us would die. The realization of this kind of knowing is indescribably paralytic. There are no do-overs.

Then, there was the calm. Sally had a few good seconds to secure my son on her raft and her son's tube to hers. She let go of the branch and again they cascaded out of our site. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, my daughter and I saw them downstream and the tour guide outfitters standing at the pick-up point deck reaching out to pull Sally and the boys to safety using long poles. My daughter and I were again spinning so fast at this point, I didn't think they were going to be able to catch us, but somehow, they did. It was a miracle. We all got on the tour bus soaking wet and shivering. I held my children so tight. I didn't want to let go. I started to eerily laugh so loud for the entire bus ride trip back to our origination point. I can't explain why I had uncontrollable laughter. It was most likely due to a nervous breakdown.

This story was also not just about what went on in the river on this particular day. The story was a precursor to a future life event that strongly resonates more starkly against the backdrop of my later struggles in my life. My life, much like the river that day, has been a series of calm stretches abruptly disrupted by churning turmoil.

The experience on the Virgin River was a profound teacher. It was a stark reminder of life's fragility and the suddenness with which peace can be shattered. This lesson paralleled my

fraught life and the serious consequences of corruption that we faced months later, standing in the Texas heat, fighting for our lives, justice, and our families. Both experiences, though vastly different, taught me about the resilience of the human spirit and the power of faith. I realized that life, like the river, is a sequence of ebbs and flows. The calm moments are precious, a time for gathering strength for the inevitable rapids ahead.

On Munitions

Weapons can be used to control and manipulate people, and as we know guns, knives, and explosives, can kill and maim. However, words can also be a powerful weapon which can be just as lethal. I entered this world in Queens, New York, a plump baby girl with fair skin, blond curls, and blue eyes. My father was a second-generation Italian Catholic immigrant, while my mother's family fled persecution from Nazi Germany to New York City. Her family changed their Jewish last names and converted to Catholicism to hide their identities. The earliest memory from my childhood that has stuck with me occurred on the Fourth of July. As a June baby, I was just three and a half years old that summer day. It was not even dark yet outside, but that did not deter me from getting the best front-row seat on our brick patio. I sat eagerly and patiently waiting for all our neighbors to set up their tables and folding chairs on the street. We had block parties in New York. Nobody in Queens had a backyard. For birthdays, holidays, or family gatherings, everyone would bring their food and drinks to the street. They would put a few orange cones up with yellow police tape to block off the street. Residents on the block knew when someone was having a party. They would just move the cone and slowly drive down the road to their own building.

I loved block parties because there were lots of happy people to talk to and tons of great food like lasagna, pizza, pastas, salads, cold cuts, fried chicken, ribs, chips, candy, cakes, and

sodas. Our neighbors, Beverly and Dan, did not mind hanging out with me occasionally even though they did not have any children. I did not mind because I loved to engage in good adult conversation. They were setting up tables for their party on the street; however, they promised me that later that evening if I was out on the patio, they would let me hold some sparklers. I jumped with joy. Then I realized that I had nobody to share in my excitement. Sally, my older sister, who was extremely introverted, wanted to be left alone to play inside with her paper dolls. I do not recall exactly what my mother was doing, but I'm pretty sure she was on the phone in our apartment, smoking a carton of cigarettes, crying, and drinking her beer. As for my dad, it was not two o'clock in the morning yet, so I knew he was not at home.

The next thing I remember was being thrown to the ground after an enormous deafening explosion that rocked the ground underneath me leaving me with cuts and scrapes all over my arms. The blast was so loud I thought I would never hear again. I just remember my ears ringing, my gait being unsteady, and seeing lots of bricks, debris and a number of toilet bowls and bathroom sinks being blown to shreds in the middle of the street. Beverly swooped me up and rushed me back inside our building. By then, I realized I was *not* deaf because I could hear all the emergency sirens blaring in the backdrop.

As it turned out, my mother was rushing out the door to find me. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw me with Bev; however, I could not tell if she was angry with me or not. When we got back inside our apartment, she gently tended to the scrapes on my wounded arms and neither me nor my sister got a beating. I would have been slapped for being outside alone and my sister would have been slapped for not being outside watching me. Sally, being three years older than me, was my keeper. My mother was too busy to watch me because she

complained on the phone every day about my compulsive gambling, drinking, cheating, bum father.

Keep in mind that these were literally my mother's words. They were the only words she uttered all day long as she talked on the phone. I am not sure who she talked to every day, but when she hung up with one caller, she would dial another and repeat her story. When she did talk to me, she told me that she was sad all the time because she did not want any more children and she regretted not getting an abortion when she found out she was pregnant with me. I used to cry for her. She felt a need to tell me the full story over and over again. I just figured she did not have anything else to talk about. Her hands reached out far, they were fast, and they left a deep sting. Her words were sharp, and they also cut deep; however, I was mesmerized by my mother. She had the most hypnotic deep blue eyes, long eyelashes, and an ample amount of black silky hair that teased up effortlessly in a beehive. She was a ninety-pound petite woman who had the roar of at least ten, four-hundred-pound lions.

On a good day, my mother let me sit in the smoke-filled bathroom while she applied her makeup and styled her hair. I loved to watch how she so skillfully applied the black liquid eyeliner on her cat eyes. Sometimes she let me hold her cigarette because she needed both hands to draw the wing with the lash brush. Every single day she did her hair, makeup, and got dressed; but she never left the house. I really used to wonder how my mother could cry each and every day, but not find the courage to change her life. I was worried for her. I knew that she wasn't a stupid woman. She graduated from an all-girls Catholic school. She was tenacious; she was intelligent, sharp, and she had stamina. She was destined for something great, but somewhere in her tormented mind she could not get out of the depression or the situation she felt she was in.

Even though I was only three and a half years old, I felt that I understood everything that was going on around me.

All the neighbors in our apartment building used to call me “Baby Wonder” because I would just start up conversations with them like I was an adult. I found it detrimental to my happiness to talk with other adults about adult things that mattered. I could not wait to start school especially because my mother grew more abusive as the days went by. My drunken, cheating, gambling bum father was still not coming home at night. My sister was failing first grade. She could not read and became more defiant toward my mother every day which only amplified the beatings she would get when she talked back to our mom. I had to fix things pretty fast, so I taught myself to read so I could teach my sister to read. It worked out really well. My mother slowed down on the beatings when my sister was passing and doing better in school and I was happier being fully engaged in books, reading newspapers, dictionaries, signs, flyers, and magazines. Anything I could get my hands on.

Now all I had to do was stop the new Puerto Rican sisters who moved in across the street from beating up my sister. I was not sure why everyone wanted to beat up on my sister; perhaps, it was because she would provoke and tease people until they cracked. Then again, the sisters across the street could have just learned that my sister required a daily beating from seeing my mother drag her by her hair every night when she refused to come in for the night. My mother did not like it when she had to physically walk across the street to bring my sister in for the night. She especially did not like to go near the Puerto Rican family. She said they were sneaky and would stab you in the back in a heartbeat.

Back to my sister, It was like clockwork. Six o'clock would come, my mother would yell from the porch for us to come inside. I would immediately drop whatever I was doing and go

inside; however, my sister just acted like she did not see or hear my mom. Mom would yell, "Pack up your paper dolls and get in here! It is time for bed and a bath." It used to drive me crazy when my mother said the word bed first and then bath. It made no sense to me. We took a bath and then we would go to bed. I would have also preferred if she yelled out "it's time for *dinner*, a bath, and bed" I really do not think I ate until I was like seven years old when we moved to Texas where I could walk to my grandparent's house to eat. Every time I asked my mother what was for dinner, she replied "Shit. Shit on a shingle." Every morning, I drank Carnation Instant Breakfast which was a packet of powdered sugar and dried milk, just add water. For lunch, I either had a piece of bologna on a stale piece of bread, or peanut butter on a stale, sometimes moldy slice of bread.

I really did not mind the mold so much. It was penicillin. I figured it couldn't hurt me since I lived with chronic infections because I was born with Combined Immune Deficiency disorder which required taking weekly penicillin as a prophylactic, a preventative measure intended to minimize chronic persistent infectious diseases. I truly do not remember eating dinner, ever. When she did cook something to eat, it was *worse* than shit on a shingle, she made liver and tripe soup. If you do not know what tripe is, do not google it. It is better that you do not know what it is. I spent many nights sleeping at the 'dinner' table because I was not allowed to leave it until I ate my tripe and liver. Around two in the morning, my father would show up. He would pick me up out of the chair and carry me to bed when he got home. Despite the late hour and his booze-ridden smell, I always felt so happy to see him.

On Parasites and Predators

If I wasn't up late at night because I did not eat my tripe, it was because I could not sleep due to nightmares, asthma, and anxiety. One evening, I woke up scared from a bad dream, so I

got out of bed around two o'clock in the morning to grab a glass of orange juice hoping it would soothe me. Of course, when I opened the refrigerator, there was no orange juice, there was never anything. So, I had water instead. I was wondering when my dad would get home.

Suddenly, I heard my father screaming and calling my mother's name to open the door. He was pleading for his life, "Help me. Open the door now!" I sprang into action and whipped the door open. In horror, I saw my dad running down the hallway, being chased by three men holding butcher knives over his head. Our large dog, named T-bone, bolted out the door in full action, growling ferociously, all teeth out. The killers narrowly escaped through the double electric doors seconds before they would have been mauled by our dog. Now that my dad had these few seconds to gain control, there was no doubt in my mind that he would have finished them off if T-Bone was not able.

Funny, my mother never woke up from her sleep despite all the commotion. If it wasn't for our beloved T-bone, my dad would not have survived that night, and I would not have survived my childhood. I always felt so safe when my dad got home even though he was a butcher, compulsive gambling bookmaker, and a drunk cheating bum. Every night thereafter, my dad's good friends, all of whom looked like they came out of a Godfather movie, drove him home every night. They were all super nice to me as well. Sometimes they needed to use the bathroom or wanted one final nightcap. If I was still awake, they would pour me a shot of blackberry brandy. They would all crack up as I chugged it down. It seemed to relieve my tight cough and asthma flares.

A few years later, my dad was in serious trouble again. His compulsive gambling, cheating, and drinking finally caught up with him. My dad's father and the rest of our Italian male family had to bail my dad out, or again, his life would be cut short. He did not require

getting bailed out of jail. Getting bailed out in my family meant paying back money owed to the shylocks or just paying them off to leave you alone. Their rules were simple. Anyone, including a three-and-a-half-year-old, could fully understand the rules. You cannot borrow money from Peter to pay Paul in New York City. The bookies knew what was going on, and my dad knew that they knew. At this juncture, my dad owed everyone money including our family priest who was conned out of a small fortune by my dad.

We had to leave New York. I didn't want to move, I had friends- five Puerto Rican sisters! We all packed up quickly and a few weeks later we arrived in Texas. When we got there, I noticed that all the license plates said, “Texas, Be safe, drive smart.” I wondered if this was the reason why our family decided to move to Texas of all places. I wanted all of them to be smart and safe. I finally found out the slogan was a highway patrol campaign meant to deter drinking and driving accidents; nevertheless, we were all together, including all four of my grandparents. Everyone in our family left New York except for some cousins and a few of my grandparents' siblings.

Regardless, Texas was a total culture shock for me, even at the innocent age of six. However, my dad changed his colors so fast that he actually blended into his new surroundings perfectly, just like a chameleon. He had a color change, but everything else about him remained the same. My dad still worked as a butcher, only this time at a major grocery store chain. He had a ton of new places to drink and tons of new friends to con. The people down South were much more trusting than New York folk, especially the folk we knew. My dad loved the hot sunny weather and the beach. Everyone loved my dad! He even started his own pest control company. Every bar he drank at, he got their pest control account. He still gambled like there was no

tomorrow, went to the race track every day, drank like a fish and he could not keep out of trouble despite the slowed-down southern-paced lifestyle.

He even developed his own southern accent. One day I asked him how he could adapt so well, and he said, “Nancy Jean, when in Rome be Roman.” Regardless that my dad could adapt to a new culture overnight, I found it to be a challenge. I had strong convictions about certain things in the world which I would not betray. Plus, it was a little difficult to make friends when you walked around the neighborhood everyday wearing your grandmother’s black silky slip bobby pinned to your head pretending to be a nun. This was an acceptable practice in New York for some reason, but not in Texas. Kids thought I was a weirdo, and my New York accent and my assertive behaviors did not help matters. As soon as I started school, my teachers put me in speech class. They wanted to completely get rid of my New York accent. Of course, I knew *how* to pronounce words properly; I was a genius! They just wouldn’t have it.

It was completely unacceptable for me to call soda, soder, or Miss Monica, Miss Monicer, or Dr. Pepper, Dr. Peppa, and so on. However, it was perfectly acceptable to mispronounce words with a southern accent. For instance, saying Y’all instead of you all, bolled instead of boiled, and ol instead of oil! My second-grade teacher asked the class if we wanted some “bolled” nuts or potato chips fried in sunflower “ol” for our daily snack!” I had no idea what bolled nuts were, nevertheless, chips fried in ol!! Yet, I was the one who had to assimilate into a culture that I was not from. I was expected to accept certain beliefs that went against my morals and when I did not, they considered me an outsider even without my accent. As the saying goes, “you can take the girl out of the city, but you can’t take the city out of the girl”. Despite my dad having no problems assimilating, I felt betrayed. I did not belong.

By the time I was around eight, I did away with wearing black slips on my head. I made some friends in the neighborhood who did not seem to mind that I was bossy and competitive, so my grandmother planned a little birthday party for me. The problem was that my birthday was a very depressing time for me, the one day a year that I really enjoyed being alone and feeling super sorry for myself. Even if my birthday fell on a school day, I could barely hold in my tears when my teachers would have the class sing happy birthday to me. I was not able to happily receive all the attention.

Obviously, my mother was to blame. She could barely utter the words happy birthday to me on any day of my life without looking away from me. I could see her long eyelashes batting all over the place as she shied away from making any eye contact with me. She knew that I was not only ready to challenge her, but intentionally ready to shame her. Anything she bought me for my birthday was intended to insult or hurt me. First of all, nothing she gave to me was out of love. She gave out of duty, guilt, or with the intention to upset me in whatever way she could. She never said anything that mattered to me, she could not even convey some feelings of love on a birthday card. I probably would not have accepted anything she may have told me regardless, because all her words were dead to me, dry like a yard full of bones. As for my dad, he never bought me a birthday gift because he seriously did not know when my birthday was! No matter how many times my sister and grandmother reminded him not to forget my birthday every year, he forgot.

One day, a few days *after* my eighth birthday, I saw my dad pulling up onto our very steep driveway. He got out of his car staggering and was clumsily groping what appeared to be a birthday cake. I greeted him outside to help him, but he tripped. The cake flew out of his hands and splattered all over the porch. It was now a mess of crumbled confection; its layers blasted

apart like a chaotic kaleidoscope of sugar and flour all over the place! Our very distinctive jalousie glass doors and windows were doused with icing, a mishmash of vibrant colors and textures, as if someone had dropped a soaking wet paintbrush onto a pile of my broken dreams.

I had around thirty minutes to clean up the mess before my mother got home. It would take me an hour just to clean the twenty-slotted jalousie windows on our front door; nevertheless, the two jalousie windows that sat on each side of the front door, plus, all the screens! The next thing I know, I see an army of running red creatures with thin pointed long legs approaching my bare Texan feet. These red fire ants gathered so fast it made me spin! Now, the ground beneath my feet was crawling with these little killers, prickling my feet and crawling up my legs. Their sharp bites felt like a series of spiny needles piercing my skin. It did not take long for my dad to realize I was severely allergic to red ants. Off to the hospital we went….

After the doctors released me from the emergency room, my dad drove me back home. He could not stay because he had to spray a few of his bars for bugs; plus, I knew he really was not living at the house even though all his stuff was still there. It was okay because I was feeling considerably better after being pumped up with a bunch of intravenous drugs and to my surprise, all the doors, windows, and patio had been cleaned up. It was unusually sparkling clean! I never appreciated my sister like I did on this day. She found her niche living in Texas, it was cleaning. We had wood floors to clean, tons of little glass windows to groom, lawns to mow, and fruit to pick. Cleaning calmed and soothed her and she was super good at it!

My mother was so happy with my sister that she changed my sister's role in the family. She was promoted from being my keeper to being the house and groundskeeper. There was not a day that the house did not shine, inside or out. My sis made sure all the windows and screens were cleaned, the driveway was debrid of gunk, she swept the roof and cleaned out all the

gullies, painted the walls, restored the lifeless wood floors, and pruned and mowed a ponderosa of grass and trees. In our minds, we now lived on a ranch. The downside about living on a ranch was of course, all the bugs came with the ranch. Thanks be to God that my dad now owned a bug extermination business.

Back to my mother, she still hated my dad. My mom was still drinking, but now she switched from a six-pack of beer to at least three-fifths of whiskey a day. She was still beautiful but getting thinner and thinner by the day. She finally filed for divorce. I started to eat better now that my grandparents on both sides of the family lived close by. Word had it that my sister and I had a half-baby brother. Despite the looming separation, my dad made it over a few Monday nights a month when my mom was not home. She attended Gamblers' Anonymous meetings to ensure a better-documented case for her divorce. I politely suggested she should attend some of the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings since she was already there, but she angrily denied she had a drinking problem.

Anyways, I started to look forward to Monday nights because all the men in the family would watch football in the basement and play poker after the game. No women were allowed in, except for me of course. Like the New York bookies, they got a kick out of me. It was probably because I did not rat them out for letting me puff on their cigars and cigarettes and down a good whiskey. I loved being around the strong men in the family, especially since they did not boss me around. However, on this particular evening, my dad wasn't invited to the basement, so he came over to our house to watch the football game. He was on edge. Sadly, things quickly moved south for us. One minute we are having a great talk about the Cowboys coach, and the next thing I know my dad is screaming and ranting at the players on the television as if they could hear him. I think my dad thought that I just vanished in thin air.

He was cursing the coach, the referees, and even the fans sitting in the stadium. My heart sank because I could feel his frustration and desperation seeping through every word. My mind started to drift because I needed to escape the reality of the current situation knowing we may have to quickly pack up and move again if my dad lost the bets he made on this football game. I never felt secure about the world I lived in on any given day, but I was adjusting well to Texas, despite all the bugs. My sister was even happy. We did not want to move!

I even made friends with a family of ducks and chicks that visited me every day after school. On my walk home from my elementary school, I'd stop by the grocery store and pick up *free* loaves of stale bread. I could not believe the grocery stores in Texas gave away loaves of day-old- bread to anyone who wanted them! I'd eat at least half a loaf myself before getting home—it was the best and freshest bread I ever tasted! Like clockwork, my ducks would be lined up squawking and waddling their tails excited to see me. Ducks are really interesting animals. I felt we had a lot in common. They stayed in a pack like a family, were very loving, equally emotional, and they would eat until they were stuffed! The male ducks used to fight a lot, but then they would make up quickly and not hold grudges. They were loyal to each other; but there was only one boss, the *mofioso* as we would call them in Italian.

Though I adored all my ducks, one duck held a special place in my heart—Herman. What set him apart from the rest of the ducks is that he not only loved me, he cherished me. Herman lingered by himself, staying with me for hours even though the rest of his flock went home. Nobody loved me like Herman. It was not even natural for a duck to leave his kind. He'd sit on my lap for hours as I rubbed his little head and gently stroked his little feathered back and underside. His feathers were so soft. I'd talk to him as if he were my closest confidant—because he was. Herman knew all my secrets. He loved me fiercely, so much so that he would even

defend me. If any of the other ducks dared to approach me when he was on my lap, Herman would chase them off. He was the boss of the whole hen house. I was his person, and he made sure the other ducks knew it.

Getting back to game night, I mentally re-entered the room momentarily. My dad's cursing and ranting continued, but I could tell that his despair escalated into a full-blown affair. The game clock winded down, and my dad's eyes grew larger and larger. His black pupils danced up and down to each tick of the clock like a timebomb counting down to his destruction. I was still invisible to him as his tantrum continued, and he cursed at the television.

I don't know why he was cussing so much when he did him no good. But my dad was a good cusser. First of all, in New York, cuss was not a word. It was curse. In New York, people cursed people out. They did not cuss people out. In Texas, you cussed. I even knew how to curse in Italian! I also learned that there was an actual *method* to cursing. It was not just about the actual degradation you make a person feel when you cursed them out, it was about your ability to level it up a couple hundred notches by installing fear in the foul words you spewed out. This is what made a person a great curser, the art of intimidation!

From the corner of my eye, I saw the players running off the field which triggered me to awake from my temporary separation from the present. I heard the final score. My dad's team lost. Game over. I sat frozen on the couch, still invisible to his insanity. His face turned to stone. My mind raced for something positive to cling onto, but even my thoughts seemed paralyzed at this point. Then, my dad reaches into his jacket, pulls out a gun, points it at the television and fires. Boom, one bullet! For the second time in my life, I thought I was deaf!

Only this time, I was just inches away from a madman who just released a single bullet from the chamber of a 357 magnum. Yep, our only television was destroyed, shattered in pieces

like my eardrum. He made me promise to tell my mother and the rest of my family that he was cleaning his gun, and it accidentally went off. I went with that story. Even though my grandparents lived close to us, no one questioned this incident or ever spoke about it again. I learned from a very early age that people did what they wanted or needed to do. They heard what they wanted to hear, and they saw what they wanted to see. They closed their blinds and locked their doors. This was the way it worked.

After this trauma with my father, things started to change in me. I understood that most kids are curious, so being curious was not what made me different from all the other kids. It was not because I was from New York or because I had two very dysfunctional parents. It was because I thought differently. While most kids were worry free and did not question authority too often, I was very critical about everything. Truth mattered, life mattered, death mattered, people mattered, right and wrong mattered to me. I used to get sent to the principal's office often; but it was not because I was in trouble; it was because I troubled my teachers in a different way. They could not answer the difficult and challenging questions I asked. Another issue they had was that my questions were too mature for an eight-year-old audience. They were not ready to hear the truth about the injustice of colonialism, slavery, segregation, war, the holocaust and other atrocities committed by those in power in and out of the church.

After the gunshot “accident” with my father, I realized I was the only person in my family who had any sense; so, I decided I was going to take over the ‘mafioso’ position in the family. One of the first changes I wanted to implement was to distinguish my grandparents' identities without having to differentiate them by using their country of origin. I decided to call my Italian grandmother, “big” grandma because she was super tall and large boned. I called my German grandma “little” grandma because she was very petite and short; respectively, my

grandfathers were identified as big and little as well. My dad and grandfathers vehemently objected to this, but what I said, went. The second change I was implementing was doing away with patriarchal structures in my household. Nothing was going to hold me back from doing or saying anything I wanted to. Learning the truth about God and religion also really mattered to me as well. Oh, by the way, I am Jewish. I just kind of found this out and it's a secret. I am not allowed to tell my father and his family that my mom is really a Jew, which makes me a Jew.

Despite my parents' shortcomings, they both believed in God even though they did not exactly follow God's path which left me feeling very conflicted on many levels. Surprisingly, my mother took me and my sister to church every Sunday. She even taught catechism. My grandmothers went to daily mass; but both of my grandpas were atheists until very late in life. Little grandma would take a bus to church and walk miles to get to the bus stop. She never learned how to drive. For little grandma, Christians were Christians, whether they were protestant or Catholic. She did not curse Jews like the Italian side of my family. This was because she *was* an Ashkenazi Jew on her mother's side. For some reason, she never told my mother they were Jewish, perhaps it was because she and her family converted to Catholicism after they left Lithuania.

Even though this remained a secret in the family until after she died, there were many other stories that were very suspect. The craziest story I heard happened on my parents' wedding day. After my mother and father were pronounced husband and wife at their huge Italian Catholic wedding, my little grandma pulled out a glass from her pocketbook, dropped it on the marble floor and stomped on it! If only I could have been an eyewitness to all this commotion! It must have been a shock to the entire Italian clan as they internalized that this is done only in the Jewish tradition. Another secret about my little grandma is that she was a total racist. I have

never seen anyone so frightened by black people in my entire life; especially since she grew up in the melting pot of America, New York City. I never understood the reasoning behind her thinking. I would think she would have been more afraid of white supremacist Christian people.

Despite my big grandma's antisemitic hostility towards Jews, she took me to church with her every day during the week when school was out for the summer. I used to bombard her with questions. I wanted to know how she could not like Jews if she was truly a Christian. After all, Jesus was a Jew. I also wanted to know why our family thought God only blessed people in America and not in other parts of the world. Why was God mentioned on our national currency in the eighteen hundreds? None of it made any sense to me. She told me it was because Americans believed in Jesus Christ. She said that Americans were mainly Christians who were very progressive in the United States and all over the world, who made great use of the world's "commodities" (which I call resources), building wealth for our country, thus ensuring better lives for the rest of the world. She said we were leaders, innovators and Catholicism was the only true religion, the only true God. I could not accept her ideologies about God and his justice just as I could not accept my parent's thoughts about God and sin. My dad used to tell me that mafia people who killed people for a living were forgiven by God because they went to confession. He said these men only killed the "bad" people, so it was essentially okay to murder. He also thought it was honorable to kill.

All the men in my family believed the formation of the mafia was absolutely a necessity because the government controlled everything and held all the power. As I got older, going to church became more difficult for me day by day. It was not because I did not believe in God, I just felt the church failed in their mission. Something was missing and I did not know what it was. I did not see people loving their neighbors as themselves and loving God with all their

might. From my perspective, the words that were uttered by clergy and the members in mass were also just another bone yard for dry and dead words. From my perspective, the church was just a rotating door where people walked out of the church the same way they walked in the church, day after day, week after week.

There are twelve specific words from the Catholic liturgy that haunted me day after day. Those words are, “Look not on our sins, but on the faith of the Church.” I felt these words only justified sin and the church was sending a message that it is alright to sin as long as people remained faithful to the church. Add these liturgical words to the history of the world and the church and see if this is the reason that people, Christian people, turn a blind eye to murder, violence, sexual assault, slavery, torture, genocides, organized crime, and warfare just for starters.

I wanted the church to speak out against these atrocities, to teach the true gospel message, to uphold the church handed down to Peter which is not about justifying violence in the name of God! By the time I was sixteen, all that was left of our once large family was my sister, my parents, my little grandmother, and big grandfather. Sadly, our half-brother who we never met, died in an accident. My dad never talked about it. I was still an overachiever in school and would not accept anything less than an A-plus grade in any subject. I won the American Legion award, and I scored in the top one percent in the country on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Despite the fact that my dad still was in the pest control business, we lived with severe flea infestation for over two years which caused me further serious health problems. When you walked into our house, you would see hundreds of fleas just stagnating on the walls waiting for a host to jump on and ravage. It was tragic. I literally had bites all over my body.

My mother just got married to her *third* alcoholic husband, and her abusive ways continued. At this point, I just referred to her as "Mommy Dearest" because these two short concise words perfectly articulated who she was. Everyone knew the Joan Crawford story; there was nothing else to add. I had enough, so I packed my bags, and I moved out. I signed myself out of high school at sixteen years old, took my GED, enrolled in college, and got a job as a nursing assistant at the local hospital. I received a full-ride scholarship to go to medical school because of my near perfect SAT scores. I worked at the hospital and was doing great until the unimaginable happened to me. I was driving to work one afternoon and all of a sudden, I felt a massive vice across my chest that grew tighter and tighter. It felt like I had a giant blood pressure cuff strapped around my chest that was squeezing the life out of me. Instantly, I was extremely diaphoretic, and I knew I would lose consciousness in seconds.

In these kinds of moments, survivors report thinking about their families in their final moments; but all I could think about was the fact I was experiencing a textbook description of a cardiac arrest like I read over and over in all my medical books. Luckily, I pulled over on the side of the road and put my car in park just a moment before I was lifeless in the driver's seat. By the time I was seventeen years old, I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, lupus, obstructive pulmonary disease, primary immune deficiency, stage one kidney failure, ulcerative colitis, inflammatory joint disease, and Crohn's disease. I had to take a leave of absence from school and work due to my health which meant I had to find a career that I could make my own hours since my health conditions were chronic and were not going to disappear. As I entered my early twenties, my illnesses continued. I was sick, alone, and lost sight of all my goals. I felt very discouraged. I looked for love but found it in all the wrong places. I had multiple sexual partners which led to multiple relationship failures which only led to more hurt,

degradation, and disappointment in my life. I had four experiences of male dominated violence which included sexual assault, physical assault, and kidnapping. I was held captive a number of times by four different men.

The first man was a long-term partner of mine. He was a respected member of our community. We were in a committed and monogamous relationship for over one year. He physically assaulted me, threatened to kill me, and sexually abused me for over an hour. The second man was also a long-term monogamous partner. He was a business executive I worked with on projects. He held me at gunpoint with a shotgun when I refused to cooperate in a sexual and lewd act. He ended up committing suicide with the rifle hours later.

The third man was a co-worker who held me captive in his car on an out-of-town business trip for almost twelve hours. He drove me through the Texas desert. I finally convinced him that we should go to Las Vegas to have a "little fun" so he changed his trajectory and drove to the airport. When we got inside the airport, I ran to the ticket counter and told the ticket agent I was being held against my will and to call the police. The male co-worker convinced the ticket agent that we were just having a "little argument" and that would not be necessary. She believed him and did not call security or the police despite my cries and yells for help. Then, this co-worker tried to take me by force, dragging me by the arm as I shouted, yelled, and begged for someone to call the police. *Then* the ticket agent called security and I was safe.

In the eighties women didn't talk about this kind of stuff. If you were in a relationship with a male, any sex you had was considered consensual. If you got in a car with a male, any male, it was consensual. If you do not get shot by a male holding a gun to your head, you were considered fortunate.

A few years later, my life changed for the better, *or so I thought*. I met a man that I thought I would marry. He was an aspiring young television star. He was attracted to me because I was very independent. I just opened up my own little excavation business moving and transporting crushed stone and aggregates to construction hubs in more remote areas across Texas. I became fascinated with railroads and all the engineering that went into constructing and maintaining them; so, I started learning about the specific mineralogical composition of rock and aggregates that were used by contractors to support and maintain these railway systems. We were the perfect power couple in a perfect relationship. We never fought, we were not dysfunctional or codependent. Neither of us were alcoholics or compulsive gamblers, cheaters, beaters, or frauds. Then, the tide changed. I was pregnant at twenty-one. My high-profile boyfriend not only demanded that I have an abortion, but he instantly threatened to pack up and leave the state if I did not abort the baby. For the first time, I saw him for who he was.

The fourth man that held me captive was a physician. Since I was a kid that imitated a Catholic nun for years, I did not believe in abortion which was why I used multiple forms of contraceptives and made sure I never missed a birth control pill. When I told my family about the pregnancy, they also demanded that I have an abortion. My mother told me that I was a total disgrace to the family, and they would all disown me if I went through with the pregnancy. My father and grandmother were silent. Silence carries multitudes of words. The more words, the bigger the wound. Maybe that's why I never stop talking, always over-explaining, always desperate to ensure that people truly grasp what I'm feeling and trying to say. I couldn't fathom the thought of cutting ties with my family forever. Despite everything, I loved them deeply, especially my mother, believe it or not. My sister, the one person I relied on my whole life, was

also firmly against me having a baby. I guess, in her mind, she didn't want to witness a 'Mommy Dearest,' part two. I wasn't like my mother—I was different and of course I had a plan.

I was going to outsmart my family through the art of manipulation. Manipulation was my favorite coping mechanism. I put on a performance for everyone, pretending to go along with their demands. I scheduled an appointment at a Planned Parenthood clinic under the guise of exploring my options. The clinic informed me that the visit would include a full gynecological exam to confirm the pregnancy and ensure both the baby and I were healthy. To be clear, I was not considering abortion. I felt this child, this life inside of me. My plan was to meet with the doctor, confirm the pregnancy again, and then tell my family that, due to my health issues, an abortion wasn't an option for me. They'd have no choice but to accept it.

When I arrived at the clinic, I was crying so hard that they moved me to an exam room right away because I was disrupting the peace in the waiting room. They asked me to put on a gown because the doctor would be coming in a few minutes to do the exam. The exam room looked the same as every exam room I had ever been in. It had a typical exam table, those that protract when the doctor wants you to lie down. I put the gown on, and I sat up on the side of the table still crying profusely. The next thing I know, a male doctor walks in holding a syringe in his hand. He looked at me and said, "Honey, stop crying. I am going to cure you today!" He constrained me by talking hold of my arm and injected a needle in it. I do not remember anything from that moment on except for laying down on the exam table. I was out cold.

On Tiny Little Mustard Seeds

I awoke. The lights in the room were dimmed. I saw an intravenous line in my arm. My heart sank in horror, and I did not need to ask. I immediately knew the life inside me was gone. I have never felt such loss. I could not speak. I could not yell. The feeling was inexplicable. I was

officially a zombie, hollowed out and numb. From that moment on, normal days ceased to exist. There was just hurt, depression, and tormenting emotion. I felt devoid of life, devoid of spirit, I felt dead inside. Darkness consumed me, or at least, I believed I was lost in its grip.

What happened next is a little difficult to put in words. I was embittered. I was praying but also speaking out harshly against God because months had passed by and I still could not find peace, absolution, or consolation. I was trashing God, begging God to ease my pain or to get rid of my pain completely. Then all of a sudden, I found myself immersed in a transcendental experience which took on a truly dark diabolical form.

It made all the pain and grief I was suffering from feel completely insignificant. In this dark transcendence**,** the devil offered me a deal. It wasn't just any deal; it was the exact deal that I had been specifically praying to God about and agonizing over. I was offered the opportunity to never experience any emotional pain or sorrow ever again. The invitation was accompanied by a "sample" of what having no pain or suffering would feel like. I became completely empty and void of emotion. I felt no suffering. I literally felt nothing.

There was no doubt in my mind where this enticing lure came from, it was positively evil. I immediately began calling, shouting aloud to God, praying aloud, reciting prayers, and begging for God to return me back to my wretched state. Instantly, I returned to who I was. I knew for the first time that God was actually with me, and that God was actually in me. To this day, I lose sleep at night wondering how many other people were presented with the same proposition; and I quiver to think how many people may have accepted this tricky evil bargain. I pray.

I understand that there may be another way of looking at this; it could have been God that showed me the other side. Afterall, God did enter the depths of hell; however, I do not think that

God, who is pure love, is capable of tempting suffering people into true darkness. This was *not* the first transcendent experience I had in my life; however, it was the experience most worthy of mention. I can also state that it was the most terrifying supernatural encounter I have ever had, the one I will never forget. Moving forward, I will try to put this experience into words to share what was revealed to me.

From a scientific perspective, pain and suffering is a complex phenomenon in which the brain responds both psychologically and physically to negative stimuli; therefore, it highlights the close connection between the mind and body. From my own theological perspective, pain and suffering includes these psychological and neurobiological processes; however, pain and suffering transcend far beyond our biological imperatives because suffering and pain is absolutely contingent and connected to spiritual actuality.

Accordingly, suffering is a simultaneous operation that dually functions on both planes, the physical and the spiritual level. The enigma of suffering suggests a reversal of order that is recognized as an inner work that dynamically coexists with transcendent aspects of our total being that can either be hidden, protected, or revealed. Therefore, to be present in our physical bodies without ever feeling pain or suffering in any way, is the actual abyss, the void, the true darkness. Without these dynamic inner works, we cannot access God, who is love. The cry of a newborn signifies the soul's journey from the spiritual world to the physical world in which the body immediately encounters negative stimuli, pain and suffering. Being present in the physical body requires this access to love, to God. In the same way, the sighs of our last breath signify the soul's journey back to the spiritual world in which we re-encounter the divine light, the transcendent Divine Creator!

Our emotions and psyche, which constitutes both the positive and the negative, is what provides the gateway to access love. Faith and reason cooperate together. Love is manifested in each and every sort of emotion or actual physical pain, whether it is a happy love, a sad love, a lost love, a lost life, even perhaps a tormenting painful ache. During my encounter, I could not pray and call out to God fast enough.

To be completely void of emotion, stimuli, pain, grief, love, and joy was completely cruel. I had my mind, I was conscious, but I was an empty shell. When I first awoke from the abortion, I stated I felt dead inside; however, I did not know what I was talking about at the time. I was not dead inside, I felt and experienced physical, mental, and spiritual pain and intense sorrow and deep grief. I was begging God to reignite me with the pain and sorrow I was feeling because when the pain is completely gone, the love is completely gone. The memory of love dies when the pain and suffering dies. I learned that there is a symbiotic relationship between love and pain, love and sorrow, love and grief. No one can know Love without knowing sorrow because no one has the means to access one without the other; no one can approach and enter because the 'ingress' is the actual path to the light of God, the love of God.

The fact that I wanted to return to my wretched emotional state can be hard to accept or understand; however, do not be misled. God is the truth, the light, the way, the true God from true God. The light of God can only be comprehended or seen when we have the means or ability to access love, otherwise we do not know Love. I was made an offer- to be truly devoid of pain. When you are devoid of pain, you also are devoid of all goodness, all sense of being, which is Love. After this experience, I realized the depth of Love, learned about the deeply concealed intricacies, and undertones of Love. Love is dynamically mighty, a rich and warm complexity, a tearful actuality, that connects us to the source of love. Evil has no connection to the source of

love for it only knows the void. After God pulled me back from the brink of this true void, I was grateful to be reunited with my two special companions, grief and sorrow. Simply stated, pain and suffering, is love turned inside out.

It is very important for me to tell you that this insight is not intended to invalidate any person's suffering and pain or the way a person tends to their own suffering and pain. I am also not saying that hurt, heartache, pain, grief and trauma no longer affect me. I am as affected by suffering and pain as you will see when you read the rest of my story. Transformation does not exonerate pain and suffering.

What I will stress is that no one desires to suffer and experience loss and pain; but do not lose heart! True darkness does exist and the hope and the prayer is that we are able to embrace the light in whatever way it is present to us. All of us are inextricably connected together by love. Pain is not a punishment from God, it is a tool to access the source of love, the connection in which we are able to reach the deeper spiritual realms of love in our human lives in order to experience and know the difference.

On Mountains that Move

A few years down the road, I fell for a different wrong man all over again. Despite still being on contraceptives, I found myself to be pregnant again at 29 years old. When I told my partner, it didn't go well. He grabbed me by the neck, tried to choke the life out of me. Somehow, I broke free from his grip. He sped off on a destructive driving frenzy, doing 'donuts' on all my neighbors' lawns before crashing through my gated community's security gate. The police were called, and he was arrested for domestic violence and for leaving a path of chaos in his wake.

I wondered how I could still be so blind, especially after such eye-opening experiences. All I can say at this point is that I knew that I did not fail myself, and more importantly, I knew I did not fail God. Closure is a funny thing. At times we find it in our lives, and other times we do not. Nonetheless, we walk forward affirming our life journeys that unfold over long spans of time and embrace the intimate chapters of our lives.

I remained an unmarried woman and my health issues were ongoing. My business was doing pretty good. I was now a ballasting railway contractor who worked with new rail and maintained existing rail. I still had no formal education, no truly supportive family members, and only one true friend, my sister Sally. I was essentially on my own again, but I had God, and this time I got a do-over! I was determined to make this my miracle story! I did not need validation from anyone, including my family. My first decision was to go to court to terminate the father's rights, rather than terminating my own child's life. I was in charge now. I led other women to take control over their own bodies and lives. I was an independent woman shining like the brightest star in the galaxy, full of confidence. I knew my life had taken a turn for the best, and so did everyone else. No one in my life, not even my mother, could diminish this moment for me. I knew with great confidence that sometimes we do not need to make any great effort to carry ourselves forward—God does it for us. Indeed. Amen, amen.

For the next eight months, I zoned in on my work and hammered away at my financial goals. I made the decision not to date at all, because my mission was to be the best mother possible. I was fully committed and eagerly looking forward to motherhood, single motherhood. My obstetrician once told me the only thing a child needed was love. He'll never know how much this hit home for me. I had so much love to give. Everything else would fall into place. After my daughter was born, I was overwhelmed by the love I felt for my daughter which I knew

existed but never experienced- my life now was full of meaning. I had so much love to give, but I never thought about all the love that I would receive. Feeling grateful is an understatement. This love, this life changed everything about me. Mountains now moved for me, absolutely nothing was impossible for me now, because of her- the light in my life that literally changed who I was.

Even though I needed to prove to myself and my family that I could be wildly financially successful despite all my circumstances, I realized raising a child with a big trust fund was not the end goal. Money was just another empty promise. I wanted my daughter's foundation to be built on the rock, not on the false security of wealth. When my daughter was two years old, I had another serious cardiac event which was a 911 emergency. Paramedics quickly descended upon me, but all I could see was my daughter's terrified large brown eyes welling up with tears as they tried to shield her from seeing them work on me. Life would be different for her now.

I made a vow to God that day. My daughter belonged to God, not me. As her mother, it was my duty to guide her to know God and raise her with strong ethical values. I didn't want to tell her who to be—I wanted to show her who to be, so I led her by example. I enrolled her in Protestant Christian preschool, and I devoted my life to God. I knew that my baby daughter, who *was* my heart, needed something greater than anything I could ever give her or be for her. She needed God, the source to all goodness, love, perfection and righteousness. The Lord would take care of everything.

Even my family had a change of heart moving forward! My mother and her third husband completely stopped drinking. My sister had a change of heart and had a son of her own. My little grandma was still alive and doing super well. My dad was even behaving! Our parents could not

bear to be away from their baby grandchildren! Everyone showered them with love, which in turn showered me with love. Things never felt so right…

On Miracles

Both me and my sister were financially independent at this point, and close to each other even though she had her hands full raising her son and working overtime running a pathology clinic out of New Mexico. I can say with absolute certainty that we gave our children the lives we never had. In turn, it helped our parents become better people.

Every person has (or will have) their own faith story. Our stories really overlap with other people's stories, and this is how we grow in communion with each other. It all starts with the faith of a little mustard seed. Seeds need to be nurtured to grow! One way or another, God nourishes us, his seeds. Most of the time we do not even have the capacity to nourish our own seeds for one reason or another. Seeds can scatter, but somehow, they find nourishment, even the seeds that fall on hard ground. Sometimes the smallest seeds become the largest trees and fields of trees grow and blossom from there. My seed landed on hard ground, my small seed became a large tree, and now for the third time, a field of trees grew and tripled! This time, I would give birth to a son at forty years old when there was literally no chance of becoming pregnant and carrying a child to term. Miracles happen each and every day. This time, I was completely in awe of the love of God.

It was January, one year before my son would be born. I just had some life changing heart surgery in December. I totally missed Christmas and my daughter's birthday, so Sally took the week off and decided to take me and my daughter to this trendy restaurant to celebrate the holidays. The restaurant was not a quiet place, it was almost like a nightclub, so I was not concerned about Sally, who was pumping her son up with way too many Shirley Temple's.

Meanwhile, my daughter had all ten of her new Barbie dolls and their clothes scattered all over the table at this super bougie fine dining club. There was a table of six men sitting next to us laughing, obviously getting a kick out of Sally's son who was clearly on a cherry and caffeine caravan; but one man, who had a bright white smile and bleached blond hair, seemed particularly fascinated with me. The next thing I know he sits down at our table, uninvited of course, and starts to play barbies with my daughter. I was impressed with all his barbie talk; frankly, it was the best pick-up line that I have ever heard in my life! Sparks flew and we were married six months later.

Then, everything fell apart. How could I have missed all the red flags? We were completely in love, both Catholic, both committed to a life-long monogamous marriage, we both wanted to have a child and raise our families together. Plus, he already loved my daughter and even liked my sister and her child. He was a super talented athlete with big dreams. He was smart, extraordinarily healthy, educated, and he loved working in sports. What could go wrong?

For once in my life, *both* of us were thrilled that we got pregnant right away! However, my doctors were not happy at all. All of them pleaded with me *not* to have the baby because there was a high probability I would not survive childbirth because of my heart. After almost eleven full months of pregnancy, they finally scheduled me for a cesarean section. I will never forget the smiles on my doctors' faces when they delivered our son. My obstetrician, smiling ear to ear, lifted up our baby so everyone in the room could see him and shouted, "This one's a keeper!" Although he looked bald at first glance, our baby boy actually had a full thick head of hair which was practically pure white. Our little towhead's eyes were mirrors of the bluest glass that I have ever seen. His big blue eyes reflected radiance and brightness, sun-shined rays of light

that scattered his joyful energy like pixie dust in every direction. My baby was born with a smile on his face.

A few hours later, my health started to decline. My blood pressure was lower than 80/60 and falling. I had fluid overload and was being treated for multiple infections from the surgery as my heart was spiraling into failure. The nurses wheeled my baby to my bedside in a bassinet, and that is where he stayed throughout my hospital stay. They wanted me to be able to bond with him and feed him just like if I was at home. The staff was incredible, they took care of me and my baby, doing everything that I couldn't do. As for my husband, I'm not sure where he was or what he was doing—he popped in and out of the hospital, mostly out, and very drunk.

I will never forget the way my son and I bonded, especially because I could not hold and rock him for very long as I did with my daughter. So, I reached into his soft bassinet and gently curled my hand around his tiny body so he could feel my presence and warmth. Then, this little miracle baby strongly wrapped his teeny finger around my finger, and he did not let go! My baby was indeed aware of my presence, and he loved me! I was deeply moved by this; but I was also amazed by how aware and cognitive he was. It was truly remarkable.

We held each other's hand every night from that day forward. He was my blonde son-shine, and I was his blessed and deliriously happy mother! Just like that, the field of trees grew and blossomed! Around three months later, I was healthy enough to go home, and we were discharged from the hospital.

On Generational Trauma

Through this very fast ride of the chapters of my life thus far, I know I am a survivor. I made it into the world, survived my childhood, labor, bad health, parasites and predators, and wielded dangerous munitions and raging waters. I succeeded in a completely male-dominated

business while raising both my daughter and my son with no financial support and zero involvement from their respective fathers or any of their families. Even though I made a success out of my life, reconciled with my family, and found God, I ended up marrying my own compulsive gambling, lying, drinking, cheating, bum, in my mother's words, of course. I just could not accept that the man that I married, the love of my life who was everything I ever wanted, was incapable of loving me or the kids; so, I spent years trying to fix him.

It is extremely hard to admit, especially after years of deeply criticizing my mother, that I repeated the familial cycle of generational dysfunction. I was a successful businesswoman. I was living the dream of being the best mother giving my daughter her very best life, but I could not escape my past. I was at the homestretch of escaping the generational cycle of shame—but it still caught up with me and pulled me under. In theory, I failed.

I loathe the bad choices I made, but later in life I learned why we get stuck in familial cycles of trauma and violence. Since I never learned to love myself, I had no way to measure my own self-worth. I based my identity on wealth and success. Ego can also forge our identity because it has the power to obscure what we think, see, hear, and know. It blinds us because of the status quo it offers. Being a successful career woman and a single mother was not enough for me. I had to have the total package which is the expectation for all *truly* successful women. I needed to be married, have a husband, my children needed a father in order to be totally accepted in the world, in the church. Society tells us so; it defines and dictates the meaning of success. Then, it betrays us.

On Militance

The nightmare started all over again, not just for me, but for my two beautiful children. My kids wonder why I can cry at the drop of a hat on any given day. Collateral damage is real,

and anyone who believes that the intentional harm inflicted by those in power doesn't impact others needs to think again. Militancy always results in other casualties, violence breeds violence. Like the storm on the Virgin River, I was blindsided by its abrupt onslaught. One day, I am trailblazing through life despite all the horrendous difficulties, the next day everything is demolished. Indeed, the thieves came swiftly and forcibly in the night, devouring everything when they struck. Their fury stalked with ruthless intent. I was defenseless. However, this time around, I was not so hard on myself. I knew that, individually, I had very little to do with the ruins and trauma that lay in wait for me, because *militance* is always a collective bargaining deal. I never had any guidance from my family and no formal education.

Shockingly, I did not realize that being in the game in corporate America required real life body armor. The bookies' rules in New York were simple. They were straight up. Their word was law. Corporate America has a multifaceted identity and alter ego. The powers are the ones that dictate *what* you do and *when* you can do it. Their word is *not* law because the law is intentionally meant to be ambiguous– laws are written to bend in either direction, it just depends on who you are and who is in charge.

The story I am going to tell is about a different kind of storm, the "perfect storm" in which the tempest opens the floodgates to social and political tragedy. It is in *this* kind of storm that moral culpability just does not exist. The actors in power move faster than the thief in the night. They strike without warning. They have many faces that have heads that regenerate, when one gets cut off, two more grow in its place. They have tentacles that reach far into the web that spins the story, the truth, and the histories of people, places, and time which completely undermine human dignity, freedom, and agency. I am talking about power in our society and laws that were written to serve and protect; *or so I thought*.

After over twenty-five plus years of demonstrating strong work ethics and succeeding in a male dominated industry, it took an administrative board of six men minutes to destroy me and my entire life's work. A perfect storm always contains factors that align in just the right way that create disastrous situations or events; so, for so many elements to actually converge perfectly together is highly improbable, which is *why* a perfect storm is so volatile and unbelievable to people. It is an impossible idea that has limitless boundaries. The takedown of my company and the snowballing started after receiving notification from a civil rights divisional chief that my company was accepted to participate in a federal initiative program that ensures equal opportunities in business for women. I was not surprised my company was nominated and elected because I was among the few, if not the only, woman in the industry without a male that had a stake in the business. To clarify, this means not having fathers, brothers, husbands, male family members, boyfriends, or a male business partner that owned the company, helped start it, or finance it.

I started this business all by myself, with no money. At the time, all I had was good credit and the ability to sign on a dotted line. In Texas, the heavy equipment industry was booming. I bought a mini excavator and financed it through the equipment company I purchased it from. Without John Deere catering to small businesses and offering financing, I would not have made it in this industry. All I had to do from this point was find customers that needed dirt or stone removed or brought in. No one wanted to drive to remote areas of Texas hauling heavy equipment on a trailer in the middle of nowhere. I was at peace with it because I knew a business like this could help me reach my financial goals and secure my financial future.

I needed security especially because of my continuing health problems. Plus, I liked long open spaces that did not occupy large groups of humans; so, I moved crushed stone in and out of

dump trucks, small stone yards, and train units. I eventually transported the materials wherever they needed to go as my business grew. The big contractors did not want to be a part of this work force due to its low profitability and the laborious work it required. Because I was practically the only business serving this small circle of contractors, my business grew pretty fast and so did my inventory of heavy equipment. Soon, I had dump trucks, top unload excavators, and even cranes. This is what led me to become a ballasting general contractor for railway systems. I built my entire career in this industry for over twenty-five years. I was a single mother of two who worked hard and never quit despite the odds against me, especially with my health.

Being elected for this federal program ensured that I would have the opportunity to compete for high dollar government jobs, but it also guaranteed that I would win at least five to seven percent of the bids simply because I was a disadvantaged woman in business. This meant that my company would be receiving multi-million-dollar contracts from this agency. I would be going from being a general contractor to a prime contractor which deals with large public and private sectors of construction that utilize many specialized firms who work on different parts of a total project under separate contracts.

This was the financial opportunity of a lifetime, so I retained a publicist to implement a new business model that would be necessary to run an operation of this scale. I was very successful in my current general contracting business, but now I was leveling up, way up. I needed to implement certain legal and financial protections for such a business endeavor. For instance, I needed an indemnifier. Indemnification is something that offers a business broad strategies to mitigate financial risk. More importantly, it also protects all future operations against potential unscrupulous competitors, interference by regulatory bodies, government agencies, unions, as well as protection against future or potential investors and shareholders.

As I was going through the process of implementing the new entity, I was notified that a competitor, who did a lot of work for prime contractors, filed false and illegal liens and money owing complaints against my license. Since my general contracting firm did business with this person for over twenty years, I set up a meeting with the owner to find out what was going on. He refused to talk or cancel his fraudulent claim against my company. He told me straight to my face that he was going to take my bond and take me out of business. I laughed and walked out the door. In regard to the legal aspects of mechanics liens, every state has specific statutory requirements for filing a lien against any real property whether it is individually or corporately owned land or government owned land. They all must file preliminary notices to the respective owner in a time frame specified by the contract laws of the state.

Given the fact that this competitor had been in business for over forty-five years, he and his staff were well-versed in the procedures to file liens. He knew the liens they filed against me held no weight and were illegal, yet he pursued this course of action against me anyway. After working with him and his family's companies for years, witnessing this sudden change in attitude did not just raise red flags, it set off blaring red sirens. I immediately called my business attorney to handle the matter from here. I established a cash escrow account so the attorney could disperse the money that was owed to the competitor when they finished their phased work on my projects.

When the competitor still refused to cooperate by voluntarily removing the illegal liens from the commercial jobs, my attorney met with the regulatory agency who also knew I had just been elected to participate in this federal initiative. My attorney was highly regarded by the agency due to his specialization in this type of administrative law. He assisted companies in navigating the intricate and often politically charged process of complying with government

regulations. These agencies possess the authority to impose large fines and penalties against companies who do not perform to the strict standards they set up to regulate the industry. Without a glitch, my attorney proved to these administrative bodies that the liens were invalid and were filed with ill intent. My attorney also wanted the collective agencies involved to know that there was a cash escrow fund that was set up to dispel any notion that any competitor would not get paid for any work they may have performed. They also knew that I was willing to open more escrow accounts if needed to prove that my company was financially secure, leaving my attorney in charge of paying the monies directly to the companies that performed work for me. The administrative agency in charge of dealing with competitor-to-competitor grievances received all the legal and binding contracts from my company that bound my clients and competitors to adhere to the laws in the state. After my attorney went through all of the contracts with them, they said they would be in touch and the meeting was adjourned.

A week later, I received a notice by certified mail that my license was suspended by this agency effective immediately. It was suspended *without* any notice or a hearing which is unheard of. I thought it was sent in error because suspensions do not work this way. I contacted my attorney, who then reached out to the agency and confirmed that my license had indeed been suspended. He also told me that I was under an order to cease-and-desist all business operations immediately. He explained that there is a regulation that permits the agency to suspend a license without a hearing if they determine, based on the evidence they possess, that public health, safety, or welfare is at risk. Everyone in Texas knew that my company was not putting the health, safety, or welfare of the public in jeopardy! I did not build a bridge or a railway system that was going to collapse because I used substandard building materials. I did not put the public

at risk of being poisoned by volatile chemicals. I proved I was financially stable by securing cash in an escrow account and showed the liens were bogus.

The very next day, the attorney I had relied on for years abruptly dropped me as a client. He informed me that the agency had also just filed a restraining order against me and my company. I was prohibited not only from doing any work that was new or in progress, but my company was ordered not to make any contact with my clients- by mail, phone, email, text, regular mail, certified mail, or in person, or I would go to jail! I actually was under a gag order. My attorney would not even give me any advice on what to do next. He closed out my escrow account, sent all my important documents and money back to me, and never contacted me again. I was left out in the cold with the wolves and had no idea that I just boarded a one-way trip to hell.

These regulatory agencies were instituted to monitor and crack down on businesses that were *unlicensed*. Cease and desist orders were instituted for people who were not qualified, licensed, insured, and bonded. Unlicensed individuals would sweep through town, taking thousands of dollars from unsuspecting clients by promising goods or services that never get delivered, and then disappear with the money. These administrative regulatory agencies are equipped with codes and statutes specifically designed to identify this kind of criminal activity, allowing them to target individuals committing fraud or theft.

In contrast, licensed companies must undergo a rigorous qualification process by these agencies. This process includes criminal background checks, verification of the licensee's qualifications to perform the work, confirmation that they are free from mental health issues, and an assessment of their character, honesty, and integrity. Additionally, they must demonstrate financial responsibility through a certified financial analysis, secure bonding and insurance,

provide access to tax documents, and even show proof of child support payments if pertinent to the applicant.

In general, regulatory agencies avoid intervening in what could be considered a civil dispute between licensees for several reasons. Firstly, in cases involving money disputes, the contractor's insurance and bonding companies are typically involved. These companies have corporate lawyers who are well-funded to fight in court to avoid large payouts, especially when liens are clearly filed illegally or fraudulently like in the case with my competitor.

To clarify, administrative statutes and codes do hold significant power. They ensure that licensees are in compliance with regulations and unlicensed workers face serious consequences, including criminal charges, if they operate without the proper credentials and a valid license. There are not too many licensed contractors working in the field that have the intent to defraud their customers. They make too much money, and they are not going to put their life's work and all their investments at risk. It just doesn't make dollars and sense! To be fair, there are some licensees that may take money and not finish a job for some reason, it happens; however, I was going nowhere and begged to be allowed to finish my projects. I did not run anywhere. I stayed around to fight. I wanted to finish the work I had in progress, get paid for the work I did, and get my license and livelihood back!

Second, this operation was carried out very systematically. The original competitor who had placed false liens on the property did not willingly remove these illegal liens or withdraw his claim for money owed, despite the funds being readily available in an account for disbursement to him. The competitor's refusal to remove the liens was strategic. By not withdrawing the liens, it implied to other competitors that my business was effectively out of operation or soon was going to be. This allowed everyone to bid on the jobs I was legally barred from completing.

These other competitors were able to secure most of the work due to their pre-existing relationships with my clients. Additionally, these competitors exploited the situation by filing money owed claims against both my bond and insurance. This act of "double dipping" was part of their strategy. However, their actions were part of a *larger* scheme. When I was ordered to stop working, the dam wall broke.

All of my other competitors who I contracted with were literally forced to file legitimate claims against me because I could no longer fulfill my contractual duties being under a cease-and-desist order. All of this was not orchestrated from the one competitor who filed the money owing complaint and illegal liens. It was legitimized and systematically carried out by the regulatory agencies who controversially took my license in the first place on unwarranted grounds. The perfect storm was now in motion because with all the money owing complaints from legitimate competitors now floating in daily, it only validated the regulatory agency's decision to place such intense scrutiny on me and my company. It supported their assertion that I was a public safety risk. Subsequently, this explains why my attorney just walked away from me. The ship was sinking. Everyone had to jump ship; sadly, the captain went down with the ship.

Most people believed that I had indeed abandoned these projects—this was the narrative shared with the public, and my absence and silence only seemed to confirm it. Day after day, I was snowballed by even more new orders and causes of action against my license which would take any attorney months to go through and sort out. The term "snowballing" is used metaphorically to describe a situation where small issues lead to significant and escalating consequences. Like a snowball rolling downhill, it gathers in size and momentum, leading to an overwhelming crisis. At this juncture, I realized I was up Shitz Creek without a paddle. I was in the midst of the river's raging murky waters, being slammed and tossed around. I was drowning.

My clients and employees were innocent bystanders. My employees, who only knew one trade, suddenly found themselves jobless. These dedicated workers, many of whom had been with me for decades, didn't want to risk being blacklisted in the only industry they were skilled in, especially since most were from minority backgrounds. How is it possible that a woman who entered this industry in her twenties, came from nothing, overcame countless barriers, raised two children, and lived a life free of crime, drugs, gambling, and alcohol end up in this situation? I was highly respected in the business community, consistently sold quality materials and products, delivered top-notch services, and successfully completed projects from start to finish for over twenty-five years at the same business location. Throughout all those years, I never faced a single lawsuit or complaint, either civil or criminal.

In less than a few weeks, not even long enough to find an attorney to help me, the damage had already been done. All my competitors, except for one of them, went to all the job sites within days if not the same day of the cease-and-desist orders. Instead of telling my clients the truth, they told all of them that I took their money and ran, and that I abandoned all the jobs. They instructed them to file a complaint with the proper agencies so they could get all their money back from the state fund. Since it would be illegal for any regulatory agency to go out to all the jobs and solicit witnesses by offering them money to file a formal complaint, my competitors took it upon themselves to do it for them!

As a result of not being able to respond to over forty of my clients, I received death threats, was cursed, and was accused of every shady and horrible act imaginable by nearly everyone I knew in Texas. My reputation was completely ruined overnight. This was not just a personal attack on my career, but on my life. I was petrified not only for my safety, but by the dismal cascade of events playing out right before my very own eyes.

I always wondered why the regulatory agencies I was involved with hired top former federal law enforcement agents to head their agencies. The organization of these regulatory agencies, and maybe all regulatory agencies that have high dollar stakes in the industry, is militant, and is militant for a reason.

I finally received an actual formal hearing date months later so that I could appear in person to fight for my license to be reinstated; however, by the time I had the opportunity to present my case, I had over a hundred causes of action against my license. Remember, this entire situation began with a few initial complaints from that competitor who filed illegal liens who vowed to drive me out of business. When I arrived at the meeting, I did not expect a fair outcome. I just wanted to show up and present evidence that I did not willingly walk away from my clients, my jobs, and my entire life's work. The hearing began and was conducted by just two long-serving agency members who knew me for decades. They called the meeting to order, they presented a few exhibits into evidence that basically stated I was not being represented by an attorney, they upheld the suspension, and they scheduled another disciplinary hearing a few months down the road.

I had a stack of papers in my folder that I wanted to present. One of the documents was the register of actions, the actual transcription of the conversation between me, the regulatory agency's lead attorney, and the judge who executed the restraining order against me. In this transcript, the agency's lead attorney informed the judge that neither he nor his agency claimed I abandoned the jobs; instead, he said they determined that I intentionally walked away due to the cease-and-desist order issued by their agency. At this point, the hearing officers refused to accept any evidence I wanted to submit. Then, the hearing was adjourned.

As I was leaving the room, I asked the agency head why he was persecuting me, to which he simply responded, “Sonya, sometimes it is just a perfect storm.” I learned that day that a perfect storm is made up from a combination of rare circumstances and elements which somehow meld together in a way that is unexplainable. Setting up a perfect political storm is done by creating a drastic scenario that mirror’s truth, aligned in such a way where it is just enough to amplify each other. It mimics a storm’s natural path and includes all the elements which would undeniably make the ‘perfect storm' completely believable, even reliable.

Let me clarify what a hearing at a *regulatory* agency entails. According to the Harvard Law Review, regulatory agency hearings are simply administrative ‘mock’ courts because they are not part of the judicial branch of government that operates under the state and federal jurisdictions to hear cases based on evidentiary facts and case law. Civil courts that operate in part of the judicial branch of government follow strict legal procedures and standards, including adherence to the rules of evidence, procedure, and precedents. They also have juries made up of a body of non-biased individuals who are legally chosen and sworn in who look to matters of fact in order to come up with a verdict based on evidence presented to the court.

Regulatory court hearings derive their authority from the branch of government that establishes them, and their focus is on ensuring compliance with the regulations of the agency they represent. These hearings do not follow strict legal procedures or standards. In my case, the civil proceedings were overseen by board members or employees of the very agency that had suspended my license. They were not impartial juries or unbiased parties.

The Harvard Law Review explains that in these mock trial courts, also known as ‘kangaroo,’ courts, most of the verdicts are often predetermined, regardless of the evidence presented or admitted during the hearings. The main goal is not to ensure justice, but to reach a

specific outcome, usually unfavorable to the accursed. They note that mock courts can exist in various settings, not just in administrative law hearings. They range from informal community meetings to more organized settings, including situations with corrupt or authoritarian types of governments.

All the attorneys I consulted with after my "mock" hearing agreed that my license would be revoked regardless of any actions I took; the only way to challenge it was to file a civil suit against the agency in an actual judicial court, staying out of the kangaroo courts. That became my plan—*or so I thought*. By this point, I started to feel validated. Even though I was still the hot topic around town, I felt everyone in town pretty much knew how these regulatory agencies worked. Maybe it was because I understood now how they worked. They were after my license and that was it. I would not get back what I lost without a fight in court, a real court. I felt like I was coming out of the fog, coming out of a disorientating storm that whirled me around for months on end. I felt the calm. Then I thought, was the storm really over, or was this just a very brief moment of calm, just like the river?

I knew my license would be revoked, without a question. However, I did not know where my next dollar was going to come from, what kind of work I would do, how I would pay for an attorney to carry this lawsuit forward, how I would pay for the kids, their schooling, the house, the car, the - …. I also knew there was no way to go back, no way of reversing all this damage. I could only move forward. Winning this case seemed to be the only way I could reclaim what was mine. My intuition was right, but it was far off the target. The rumors *were* flying, and the gossip circuit was in a frenzy. But no one was talking about what mattered—how the agency had crippled me, silenced me, and left me bound and gagged. The actors in power were steps ahead

of me, far beyond my naive understanding. Frantically, I realized I was still in the storm, just in a moment of calm, and the final blow was yet to come.

A few weeks later, I received another certified letter this time coming from the district attorney's office. I was charged with three criminal felony counts. The first count was felony burglary, the second count was felony theft, and the third count was felony obtaining a credit card under false pretenses. Again, I could not breathe. I was face to face with another punishing reality that I could possibly be going up the river, maybe for a long, long time. My mind was full of questions, thoughts that again were indescribably paralytic. What would happen to my children? How would I defend myself against these ludicrous charges? How far would the actors in power go to take me down? Would they kill me?

After another two-day nervous breakdown, I got my bearings together. I knew I did not break and enter into anyone's property. I knew I did not steal anything, especially a credit card. I called the attorney who was considering taking my case against the agency and told him that I was being set up for burglary. He explained that the criminal charges now made it virtually impossible to pursue a civil case against the regulatory agency. No attorney would be willing to challenge a powerful agency that had already escalated the matter to a criminal indictment, effectively shutting down any chance of seeking justice through civil means.

Time just stopped. I was hit with a cold reality that I was now part of the criminal justice system. This meant I was subject to the procedures, laws, and authorities that govern criminal conduct, from arrest and prosecution to sentencing and potential incarceration. Being entered in the criminal justice system felt like it crossed a threshold where my basic rights were no longer acknowledged or upheld. Anything I said was *not* used against me—because I literally was not

heard. Any words I uttered were indisputably tuned out. Metaphorically, I entered a new realm of personhood, one that was marked with a crucifix.

Eventually, these trumped-up felony charges were completely dismissed and thrown out of court; nevertheless, it took an incredibly long time to navigate the entire process once I was caught up in the system. Despite not being guilty, I was treated as a criminal for a very long time. I was fingerprinted, photographed, thoroughly searched, and required to provide DNA samples. Even though I was never incarcerated, I was formerly charged, and I still had to go through the booking process which is a completely dehumanizing experience. The presumption of innocence literally does not exist in our world. When you are charged with a crime, you are guilty, one hundred percent guilty. The exploitation, shame, and the overwhelming force of this cruel type of warfare left me feeling completely gutted. Psychological warfare is one of the best strategies to disable and silence a person, it cuts off their sense of hope, truth, which leads to weakening and in all probability, killing a person's spirit. The amount of alienation I felt was indescribable. I went through this for over three years. The isolation, disbelief, and amount of confusion and fear that I felt thoroughly overwhelmed me.

I later learned that a former client was contacted by an investigator who convinced him to file a criminal complaint, falsely claiming I broke into his house and stole his credit card. The investigator assured him that if he signed the affidavit, he would likely be refunded by his credit card company the eighty-thousand dollars he had paid me for a job I did for him a year prior. This deliberately fabricated story was used to bring me into the criminal justice system. Neither the client nor the investigator was ever charged with a crime even though I had evidence that this client paid for his construction project with his credit card. I had signed and dated receipts, signed and dated contracts, signed and dated work orders, signed and dated change orders, and

signed and dated signature receipts which verified the cardholder was present and authorized the transactions.

All this evidence, but I was the liar, stripped of my agency, dignity, and sense of humanity. How were my children coping with all of this? How did they deal with all this trauma, fear, and collusion that was going on right before our very eyes? Their mother was branded as a liar, cheat, burglar, and criminal. For over three years, we endured the sneers, chuckles, the pointed fingers, within our church, at their schools, throughout our community, and even from some of my own family and friends who couldn't believe this nightmarish tale.

I was destroyed in every capacity. With my assets being frozen, contracts made null, I had no alternative financial option but to sell what I could. My kids and I lost everything. I no longer held privilege of any kind; including racial privilege because I no longer was human. We lost our sixty-three hundred square foot castle, our other properties, automobiles, prize possessions, and family heirlooms. We could not even afford to buy hygiene items. Thanks be to God for dollar stores! And, just like a felon, I couldn't find a job anywhere, doing anything, in any capacity. We were in this system for almost three grueling years. No company hires thieves that burglarize homes who have been blackballed! As I stood in line for welfare and sat in court in the criminal justice system, I finally took notice of some of the most oppressed groups of people in the world. I saw firsthand how unjust social structures fail people. Our own religious communities fail people.

About a month later, I received a call from one of my former competitors, Cory. He offered me a sales position at his electrical contracting business. Cory was a compassionate man and wonderful boss. I worked, got paid. At five o'clock, I was done with work. Freedom! Financially, things were getting better. I thought I could see a future for the first time, *or so I*

thought. Within a month, the investigator contacted Cory who wanted him to provide a list of all the clients I had communicated with on behalf of his company. He also wanted Cory to sign an affidavit stating I was not an actual employee, but rather an independent contractor. Cory refused to comply, but the investigator persisted and kept trying to pressure him into providing a list. That weekend, I was set to attend the big convention in Houston and network for Cory, but he told me to stay home and "lie low." I was fired.

Around a month later, I received a different criminal indictment in the mail. This time the charges were felony extortion and fraud. By this point, I succumbed to the routine. My pro-bono criminal attorney sorted through piles of files from the regulatory agency and found no evidence that I was guilty of fraud or extortion. If you recall, I also had the transcripts from the restraining order court hearing which spelled out that I did not abandon my jobs; therefore, there was no intent to defraud anybody.

Years before my first child was born, I was deeply moved by M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*. His life of contemplative prayer and solitude resonated with me, though I didn't know how or where to begin. It did not seem practical for a single working career woman to go into solitude. However, during this ordeal, I had nothing to stop me from embarking on this spiritual journey. The kids were in school all day and I was banished from society. I started reading the Gospels and praying in solitude which was the start of my own spiritual awakening. Living out my own version of "monk life" was a blessing, the calm in the middle of the storm for both me and my entire family. I studied, prayed, journaled, and then taught my family what I learned at night.

My trials and tribulations continued for around two and a half years. The trauma of being 'the accursed' in the criminal justice system took its toll on all of us. The agency compiled stacks

of administrative laws that they claimed I had violated. Scathingly, they had over a hundred causes of action against my license, which amounted to a minor violation. In the end, I pled guilty to a misdemeanor. I was legally punished through excessive fines and constant surveillance. The contractors who falsely claimed I owed them money went straight to my insurance and bonding companies. It was like Christmas came early for them. They were handed payouts they never earned and had no legal right to receive. The system just gave it away, whatever my policy and bond would allow. Ironically, the fines levied against me were astronomical. They were based on the cost of "unfinished" construction work; the work I was under court order not to complete. On top of that, the dollar amounts these contractors claimed I owed were *three times* higher than my original contract price with the client and *three times* more than the actual bids I received to hire subcontractors to complete the work. Every single one of them profited off my takedown.

I never served time in a jail cell, but in many ways, I lived a sentence all of my own. I was ordered by the judge who closed out the case not to make any contact with my clients, whatsoever. The courtroom was not a place for truth, but rather a stage for silence. When the judge closed the case, he sealed more than a file. He sealed my voice. I was placed under a gag order, forbidden from contacting my clients, barred from speaking the truth of what had really happened, the corruption, the setup, the betrayal. I was a woman rendered invisible, marked for welfare, and blackballed from ever working in the only field of work I knew and mastered for thirty years of my life.

This experience marked a critical inflection in my life and my children's, ultimately leaving lasting and serious consequences that altered all of our paths. Make no mistake. These events were meant to obliterate and silence me. There were never any good intentions from the

beginning. The trauma to my children was not just collateral damage from a byproduct of my own actions; they were large-scale actions by actors who only were concerned about their primary objective, militance. I was on my last leg health wise. I had a thirty-five percent lung function and was hospitalized for weeks at a time each month. Things were bleak.

On Monks and Birds of a Feather

I begin this final section with a powerful statement. Birds of the same feather don't always flock together. After the court cases were resolved, my family left Texas and relocated to a small apartment across from my youngest child's elementary school, while my oldest began college nearby. Unable to work, I enrolled in an online undergraduate theology program, supported by grants and loans. This marked a profound shift in my spiritual life going from contemplative solitude to academic study. The flexibility of online learning allowed me to progress at my own pace while balancing family responsibilities and my health issues.

I grew to love my cozy apartment, with its tall windows and numerous doors. I felt safe for the first time in a long time. Most of my adult life, I kept the doors ajar so my dogs could come and go as they pleased. I always felt a strong connection to nature, which means my doors and windows were essentially open all the time, weather permitting of course. I love letting the outdoor elements like wind, fog, and humidity inhabit my living spaces. I officially had dogs, but there was never a time when I wasn't rescuing any creature that was in need. It always seemed animals were attracted to me anywhere I resided. I can't count how many times I stopped traffic to save an injured pigeon or bird, dog, cat, raccoon, turtle, possum, skunk, even tarantulas! All of God's creation mattered to me, my embodied awareness of God mattered; however, the presence of God within creation itself really mattered because I saw God's presence everywhere.

Despite being in a new environment with better air quality, better access to health insurance and medical care, I was still sick. My heart failure was no longer a distant diagnosis. It was a daily reality that creeped closer with every hospital visit. My body grew slower and heavier. My breath was shorter, but I had a lot of magical things happening just outside my patio door. Amid all of the noise of living across the street from a five-lane highway and blaring sirens most of the day, the birds came. At first, it was subtle. A few chirps, a flutter here, a flutter there. But within a week, it became a symphony. Like clockwork, birds gathered. Their presence could not be ignored! My heart was full. It was mesmerizing. They weren't just flying *to* my patio; they were flying *into* my apartment. Uninvited, unafraid, undeterred by my two dogs, the birds must have been attracted to the scent of dog food long cleared away. My floors and counters were spotless; my entire apartment was sparkling clean. I did not live in a country hideaway. I lived in a small apartment complex with over a hundred units which was across the street from a major supermarket. We had nice landscaping with trees and shrubs, but all in all it was a real concrete chaos. Yet still, they came. And not just one kind. There were sparrows, doves, finches, brown birds with rust-colored wings and soft-bellied visitors with unknown names. They came *together.*

Birds of different feathers definitely flock together which broke every metaphor I ever heard. I began to believe they were a sign. I felt it was God's calling card slipped under my door. I told my family, "The birds are coming. They fly in every day like they live here." No one believed me. Who would? At the time I had no camera, not even on my phone. I actually was lucky I *had* a phone. At welfare, they gave me a free "Obamaphone" which was a free mobile phone under the federal government's Lifeline program. The phone gave you a small amount of voice minutes and texts for free. Sorry, folks, the Obamaphone was not equipped with a camera!

The only proof I had of this was all the bird droppings in the living room that I had to clean up daily. My dogs looked forward to seeing them pile in. I never saw a rottweiler sit still and not move a muscle, taking in every moment of this magical phenomenon.

But one day, in the midst of writing an undergraduate term paper, the chirping intensified into a clamor and a rapture of wings. My health care provider was scheduled to be here any minute to take vitals and check on me. She walked into my condo and just froze. She heard all the chirping. I told her, "Go peek into the living room and tell me how many birds are in there. And how many kinds." She walked in slowly and returned wide-eyed, as if she'd just witnessed something holy.

She whispered, "there are *tons* of birds in here. Every kind. Sparrows, doves, finches… all of them. Every bird of a feather is in your living room." That's when I knew. Heaven wasn't somewhere far off. It was already calling to me, on wings, in feathers, in the language of birds. Soon after this, my birds stopped coming. I guess I gave away our secret. It was a bit sad; but I knew this bird phenomena would not last forever. It was a gift to me. A very priceless gift that I will carry with me forever!

I continued working through school still, this time flat on my back. Congestive heart failure tightened its grip causing so many arrhythmias. Pressure was so heavily building against my chest that I couldn't walk without extreme pain and severe shortness of breath. I typed with my laptop propped up awkwardly using all the strength I had left just to think. Just like I left the patio door open, I left the front door open and the screen door. Now, I was not having birds flying in, but neighbors. The humans came.

They didn't even knock, just hovered and walked in like they owned the place. At least the birds gave me notice they were coming with their cheerful chirps. Unlike the birds, the

neighbors did not soothe me, they annoyed me. Each one had a suggestion for me- on how I could get better. “Have you tried eating a bale of kale every day? I heard kale is good for the heart.” “Can’t you get a heart transplant?” “Well, at least you don’t *look* sick!”

But the last birdie that flew in my apartment really ruffled my feathers! She spoke in a voice too loud, way too chirpy and full of empty concern. She said, “I guess you are *just* on palliative care now.” The words struck like a blow, like a bell that rang and was reverberating, *palliative care, palliative care, palliative care.* She even brought me a goodie bag with two pajama tops, size small and a pair of old red slippers, size six. I am an extra-large top and wear a size eleven shoe. The implications got real. The loss of the birds, the arrival of people, the inability to walk and breathe at the same time, the scenario where I die. But there was a positive thing- I looked good. Then the unimaginable happened.

A few days later, I started to pray deeply. I was awake on the couch and was fervently praying for healing. I was scared, mainly for my children. I am all they have. My heart was breaking knowing I may pass. The red slippered lady really shook me up. Palliative care, palliative care. Sometimes when I pray, I like to meet Jesus at our table in the garden. I sit with the Lord at our concrete table in the middle of a beautiful lush green garden, hearing the sounds of trickling water, and feeling the heat from the sunlight that shines throughout the garden. It is full of sunlight. When I engage in contemplative prayer, I center on Jesus’s presence. Sometimes I focus on an image of Jesus to help silence my mind and body. When I do visualize Jesus, he is usually dressed in an off-white tunic and has longer dark hair. I do not have an exact image of his face, it's vague.

The next thing I know is that I start praying for the healing of my heart. I started to visualize Jesus in my deep silence and surrender. I found myself lying down on top of the

concrete table in the garden. Jesus is standing over me. He places his hand on top of my heart. Instead of having a fingernail, the tip of his index finger is aflame. It glowed like a lit candle wick. His index finger was burning softly as if it was dipped in light itself. The flame didn't crackle; it radiated a gentle warmth, just flickering like a holy flame that doesn't burn, just illuminates.

I lie on the table with my eyes fixed on the flickering flame at the tip of Jesus's finger. I did not look up at Jesus's face. He moved his finger gently across my chest, using the flame like a sacred medical tool as he was performing what felt like a divine surgery on my heart. Back and forth, he traced over me with glowing precision. My gaze never left his radiant index finger.

I felt the presence, the compassion, and the love of Jesus. Jesus did not look human even though he was dressed in a tunic. His body including his arms, hands, fingers, and face looked like more of a caricature or an avatar. It is difficult to describe. However, I knew it *was* Jesus who was with me although no words were spoken at all. The presence of God's glory was above me and surrounded me in pure light. The pure light felt like the sunlight from the garden; however, it was very, very, bright. His fingertip was still glowing and burning softly. Then the fire reached my heart, the flame touched my heart and I knew at that moment I was in a different realm, a different space that was timeless, and now my focus was more on Jesus's hand and the white shrouds of clothing that covered his arms as he operated on my heart with his holy fingertip of pure light. The flame opened my heart. Nothing could have prepared me for what came next. I could never have imagined anything like it, ever. I was aware that I stepped into a moment that didn't belong to this world. There was no sound, only overwhelming light that was so pure. Everything slowed down, there was no hurry.

What happened next left me utterly stunned, but in the most beatific way. Jesus, with infinite gentleness, took around ten long steel nails directly out of my heart. Jesus held them up before my eyes, then he set them down one by one and placed them beside me as I continued to lay flat on my back on the cement table. I thought that Jesus was finished. Then, I saw his finger-a-flame still at work. He removed around ten more nails from the center of my heart; but this time all the nails were covered with rust. I was dismayed, but not afraid. I also felt excited, like I wanted to run and tell someone, but I was frozen in time and did not move or utter a word. He placed the rusty nails down on the table one by one, again stacking them atop one another. Jesus continued to use his index finger of fire like a tool continuing to move it around my heart. Throughout this encounter with God, I had no sense of time or space. I was not in my apartment or in the realm of the world we live in. I was totally in the presence of God lying on this table with abundant light surrounding us. Jesus continued to reach into my heart with sacred perfection, this time removing a large plank of wood. He held the wood plank before my eyes, then placed it on the table next to the nails. He continued reaching in and removed four more wooden planks, one by one, holding each up in front of my eyes before stacking them on top of the others. At this moment, I was still in the complete presence of God, and all His glory was still above and below me, surrounding me in pure light. The light still felt very, very, bright. Jesus's fingertip was still glowing and burning softly. I had feelings that are impossible to describe. Words cannot describe the awe I felt. I thought Jesus was finished with this healing. I was not eager to get up or leave Jesus's presence, I just wanted to engage my spirit, my excitement, my dismay to him; but I could not move about, and I was not able to express myself to him with words or any actions. Jesus continued to reach in my heart with his fingertip aflame over and over again. The next thing I see is Jesus removing six, rusted, discolored, weathered, and

splintered planks of wood from my heart. He held those planks of wood in front of my eyes and laid them beside the other wood planks. I believed I was cured. I knew this "operation" was now over. Then to my dismay, Jesus returned back into my heart. I remained focused on his hands, his finger of pure light, and how gently, slowly, and compassionately he worked on my heart. Astonished again, Jesus pulled out vines that were entangled together in clumps around my heart. I watched him unravel these vines which were constricting my heart. He showed me the balls of vines knotted up and placed the vines on top of the planks. Jesus reached in again. This time he pulled out weeds, a lot of weeds. He showed me the weeds and placed them on top of the vines. Surely at this point I could not anticipate what would happen next, but I was calm and felt very safe and elated but still could not communicate my spirit to Jesus with words or actions. Then Jesus goes back in my heart for the last time. This time, he pulled out long strands of dried out dead and brittle brush that was full of thorns. He holds the dead brush and thorns in front of my eyes. He then places the old dead brush and thorns on top of the weeds. The next thing I know, I'm back on my couch in my living room. Just like that. No flash, no sound, no birds, just me, sitting there. Tears started to flood my apartment. In complete awe, I dropped my head and started praying, thanking the Lord for healing me. I did not know what to do about this profound encounter. I wanted to make sure I was healed. I felt like Gideon, the self-doubting farmer in Judges, that constantly needed a sign in order for him to believe he was delivered. After all, this was a *lot* for me to take in. I stood up and started walking all around the apartment. I could breathe and walk at the same time. I walked all over the neighborhood, waving as I passed the red slipper lady's house. Then I went to the grocery store across the big highway. They knew me and my family well, so they left me alone as I walked up and down the grocery aisles holding onto an empty shopping cart for an hour. I got a call from my worried daughter who picked up

my son from school. I tell her I am walking around Albertsons. She could not imagine how- I told her I was healed.

I had so much to say, but I could not find the exact words. All I can say is that an enormous healing took place without a single word spoken. Nothing. Just the work of God, then everything changed.

Chapter 5: Findings and Reflexive Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of this study through an autoethnographic method that integrates lived experience with critical theory and resistance. As Beattie (2021, 2024) argues, the value of autoethnography lies in its ability to generate meaning through reflexive insight, cultural analysis, and scholarly synthesis.

The narrative in chapter 4 functioned as *data* for specifically analyzing systemic postcolonial violence. My goal in this chapter is not to universalize my experience, nor to make comparisons to colonized or oppressed populations, but rather to show how the traumas that I have endured reflect broader systemic patterns of postcolonial and patriarchal violence that operate within U.S. institutions and culture. By doing this, I offer a grounded hypothesis: that white-identifying women in the contemporary United States are affected by postcolonial violence, in a structural and systemic sense despite complicity or racial privilege.

I demonstrate how my experiences can serve as case studies for examining how postcolonial power operates differently across geopolitical, legal, cultural, and religious contexts. Through this lens, my findings are both deeply personal and analytically healing. They expose how postcolonial structures of domination and control persist within the everyday lives of white women through domestic, political, and institutional forms of violence. Postcolonial critique names the systems that cause violence and trauma, yet allowing a place for resistance to reclaim identity, history, memory, and narrating trauma through one's own words.

I will be using a layered approach sticking to a non-hierarchical writing structure for analysis and reflection. Additionally, a thorough scholarly synthesis will require continuing using the method of reflectivity This includes talking about myself in first, second and third person interchangeably throughout this chapter. In the cultural critique, I will use my own

embodied experiences and perspective instead of relying exclusively on external cultural theory. I will draw from my own lived experiences and observations to interrogate the social, political, legal, and domestic structures that have shaped my life. My analysis centers on how everyday moments reflect and reproduce larger systems of power, trauma, and postcolonial violence and trauma.

My formatting strategy is as follows: I will locate the data in the subheadings of the autoethnography using vignettes that will be labeled according to the narrative data. Fragments of the memory data and extracts of the artifacts will be italicized and in quotations. For the literature and theoretical framework, I will use quotations or citations from the specific source of critical conversation (Beattie 2021, 65–66). I will use my research questions and the ideas, arguments, and questions from the scholars to guide the emerging themes and patterns throughout the chapter (66–67).

In these vignettes, each lived experience reveals how postcolonial violence and structures are deeply entrenched in sustained systems of oppression, particularly for white females in the United States (Hawley 1999, 769–87). Postcolonial violence and trauma not only manifest itself through direct physical and gendered violence, but also through a vast array of psychological pathologies and epistemic, political, and economic control and erasure as seen throughout this narrative. **(**Young 2016, 5–8; Fanon 2004, 98–101).

Vignette #1: The Block Party. A Blast!

> *My mother was too busy to watch me because she complained on the phone every day about my compulsive gambling, drinking, cheating, bum father. Keep in mind that these were literally my mother's words. The next thing I remember was being thrown to the ground after an enormous deafening explosion that rocked the ground underneath me, leaving me with cuts and scrapes all over my arms.*

At just three years old, Little Nancy finds herself outside alone on the Fourth of July, left unattended while neighbors set up for a festive block party. She is lonely, but optimistic. She seeks companionship, not from children, but from adults. Her longing for connection reveals a deeper yearning to be seen, heard, and loved. Her attempt to engage in meaningful conversation reflects a precocious effort to find belonging in a world where she is otherwise invisible.

In analyzing this vignette through theory, I resonate my experience on this particular day with profound emotional alienation. Oliver's work on traumatic psychological social oppression and violence illustrates how patriarchal and postcolonial structures can produce "psychic colonization" in children in which the child internalizes shame, unworthiness, and inferiority passed down from the mother. Oliver's (2004, 41–43, 88–89) work also highlights how these oppressive structures shape maternal depression. My mother, unable to find worth in her unpaid domestic labor, becomes alienated from herself and others. Oliver writes that in these cases, "shame becomes a structure of subjectivity" where the mother's internalized oppression reproduces psychic injury in the child (88).

This is evident in Little Nancy's feelings of loneliness and her longing for connection with adults; not only seeking them to love her, but also to protect her physically and emotionally. Oliver emphasizes that maternal trauma, especially unacknowledged and repeated shame, can fracture identity and produce lasting effects on the child's psyche (Oliver 2004, 117, 121). Little Nancy's explosion injury, while physical, is also psychological which steals her sense of security and wellbeing.

Vignette # 1A: Lion's Roar

> *She had the most hypnotic deep blue eyes, long eyelashes, and an ample amount of black silky hair that teased up effortlessly in a beehive. She was a ninety-pound petite woman who had the roar of at least ten, four-hundred-pound lions.*

This hauntingly beautiful description reflects little Nancy's love, admiration, and confusion for her mother. Despite her mother's neglect, Nancy reveres her. But this admiration masks a more insidious cultural condition which is the commodification and objectification of the female body under patriarchal, postcolonial capitalism.

McClintock's concepts illustrate how imperial power operates through the family making gendered naturalized and institutionalizing women's subordination through unpaid domestic labor (McClintock 1995, 358–60). Nancy's mother exemplifies this domestic situation. She is a housewife dependent on her husband, who is absent, irresponsible, and financially reckless. She fulfills her "expected" roles as a wife and mother but receives neither social nor economic support.

Even as a precocious child, there were so many things my young mind could not comprehend. In my autobiography, I write, "Every *single day she did her hair, makeup, and got dressed up; but she never left the house*." McClintock (1995, 358–59) explains how such roles are not natural but constructed by colonial and capitalist systems that require a gendered division of labor. In this case, my mother is bound by Catholic ideologies that glorify maternal sacrifice and demonize female autonomy. Despite her winning a national beauty contest to be the spokesmodel for Canada Dry Ginger Ale, a rare opportunity for a female in the sixties, my mother was forced to abandon her ambition in favor of staying home, a decision reinforced by religious and cultural norms.

My mother lived by Mies' definition of "housewifisation" because her being a wife of an Italian Catholic male, she was denied the means to build an independent livelihood and establish a successful career (Mies 2012, 177–78). For my mother, this completely reinforced her dependence on her spouse even though he provided no financial support for any of us because of

his compulsive gambling and drinking problem. She was forced to degrade herself further by borrowing money from her father-in-law which showed how she not only failed as a mother, but as a wife. Having no economic value assigned to her work at home, illustrates the arguments of both Oliver and McClintock (1995, 131, 148–49) that imperial labor and political strategies rely on institutionalized gendered and racialized boundaries that divide women. Maria Mies's concept of "housewifisation" reveals how unpaid domestic work is central to capitalist economies yet is devalued and rendered invisible (Mies 2012, 177–78). My mother was denied access to economic independence and was forced to rely on her "compulsive gambler and alcoholic" husband for support only perpetuating her feelings of failure and dependency.

McClintock and Oliver converge on the insight that the mother's sense of worthlessness is produced not by personal failure, but by systemic oppression. As McClintock (1995, 144, 152–54) notes, women's labor, sexuality, and social position are policed and regulated through imperial ideologies. McClintock illuminates how the mother is shamed for her husband's failures, which demonstrates how patriarchal systems make women accountable for any transgression the male figure in the family unit makes. This is also echoed in Catholicism, how the woman makes the man and is repeated and used to justify male oppression and violence to women.

Reflecting back on the big "Independence Day" party, I do not think that my mother would have been well received by our racially mixed community of Catholics. For one, my mother did not fit in with the happy or well-behaved wives which could have been counterproductive for her well-being; especially due to the cultural connotations of a former beauty queen who gave up her crown. Secondly, my father would not have been at the party

because he had to “work” late that evening. Third, small talk or ‘ladylike’ talk was not one of my mother’s best traits, remember the “roar” of a tiger, unleashed.

Even though my mother was a perfect example of what beauty was in her era, thin, pale, well-groomed and styled, she was still consumed by shame and a sense of inferiority and guilt. Despite my father mistreating her, Italian men used to come over and proposition my mother. If she agreed to go out with them, they would cancel all my dad’s debt. Some of the men even offered to kill him in hopes to get together permanently with my mother. Her constant talk about how she should have aborted me was very abusive. Even as a young child, I knew there was something bigger brewing inside her. I knew her cries were not just from a bored housewife denied independence. Her pain was from something deeper. Her cries and rants were calls for help. I believe she was sorry for continually directing her anger on two small innocent children; however, there was no one there to help ease her pain.

As I grew up, I realized that there was no food on the table because my father spent all his money at the track, on women, and at the bar. I also knew my mother was smart and strong and could have supported both me and my sister; however, white Catholic culture did not support women leaving the home to work.

The Catholic Church’s condemnation of birth control forced my mother to have children she could not care for. Culturally and religiously, she would have been shunned for stepping outside her expected role, especially if it meant greater economic and social position. Her depression, rage, and neglect were not simply individual failures but rather consequences of the power at play that reduces women to caretakers who do not get paid for their work.

Oliver, McClintock, and Mies each expose how these imperialist systemic forces fracture women and their children’s identity. We became the benefactors of intergenerational trauma.

These narratives provide a crucial framework to argue that postcolonial violence in the United States functions not only through race and nation but through domestic, maternal, and psychic institutions that target white women as well. My mother felt like a servant to my father and his family. She was invisible, sexualized, devalued, and historically naturalized in the postcolonial period in the United States.

Vignette #2: Dinner Time. Good Knife, Sweet Dreams.

> *Then again, the Puerto Rican sisters across the street could have just learned that my sister required a daily beating from seeing my mother drag her by her hair every night when she refused to come in for the night. My mother did not like it when she had to physically walk across the street to bring my sister in for the night. It was like clockwork.*

This vignette demonstrates how postcolonial violence and trauma are transmitted intergenerationally through the domestic institution within white families in the contemporary United States. Nancy's mother is a white working-class woman who violently assaults her two daughters, verbally and physically which aligns with direct manifestation of systemic postcolonial control and violent behaviors embedded in capitalism, labor, gendered roles, and the "cult" of domesticity for the white American family (McClintock 1995, 169). This illustration furthers postcolonial expressions by also showing how my mother exhibits racist behavior and sustains patriarchal roles in the home, community, and in her church. I was just three years old and I already knew the girls across the street were considered 'the others' and that worked both ways. Today I understand the dynamics of what was happening in this scene. The Puerto Ricans wanted nothing to do with us. I tried to make friends when they moved in, but all I got was stares and glares from each sister. From that point on, I kept to myself. I was not like this despite what my family told me about them. Regardless, I wanted to be friends with them. Afterall, we were neighbors!

Beyond the geography, Fanon (2008, 66) theorizes that colonialism goes well beyond physical occupation because it is a system that sustains itself by producing a range of psychological disorders such as identity fragmentation and neurotic behavior that is intergenerational. Oliver (2004, 121) builds on this, showing that the shame, anger, and depression experienced by my own mother was not just an individual form of mental illness, but rather a *socially* structured pathology resulting from systemic dehumanization (see also Fanon 2008, 188). Together, Fanon and Oliver show that postcolonial subjects experience a total loss of self, not just a loss of another, which is another imperial myth (Oliver 2004, 124). Fanon directly views colonialism as a social system that is the producer for neurotic tendencies which resonate with my mother's psychological issues that parallel systemic postcolonial strategies that are sustained by women today in the United States.

This intergenerational trauma that plays out in this scene is most clear by seeing how my mother was devalued and considered both an economic and a domestic failure. She also is a moral failure because she cannot provide food, emotional care, or security to her children.

She is shamed by family, church, and community. She is isolated, disrespected, and silenced, even though she is white and beautiful which illustrates that postcolonial violence also targets white women when they fail to conform to imperial standards of obedience, beauty, domestication, and femininity. The fact that she had been selected as a spokesmodel for Canada Dry but had to give up that path due to the lack of support by her spouse, family, and church reveals how capitalism and patriarchy colluded to eliminate women's agency, regardless of race, complicity, or privilege. Yet, because she is white, she is also expected to sustain and reproduce these very systems of domination by giving in to the myths of race, gender, sexuality, and superiority both ethnically, economically, politically, reproductively, and religiously.

Vignette # 2A: The Butcher and the Knives

> *Suddenly, I heard my father screaming and calling my mother's name to open the door. He was pleading for his life… I saw my dad running down the hallway, being chased by three men holding butcher knives… Our family dog, T-bone, bolted out the door in full action, growling ferociously…*

Fanon's theories on colonial neurosis help us understand how violence breeds violence. This scene dramatizes how violence permeates every dimension of my family life. I experienced physical and developmental violence and abandonment. I saw economic violence first-hand at three years old and I was raised in a white patriarchal household that could not care for or protect its most vulnerable members. Fanon (2004, 90) insists that colonialism generates aggression because it is built on hierarchies of domination that rely on coercion, exclusion, and fear. In this context, my family is not "dysfunctional" because it was functioning exactly as postcolonial capitalism intends; it reproduces shame, control, inequality, and dependency for white women.

From a cultural critique standpoint, there are many contradictions. By Western standards, my mother is beautiful. She is thin, elegant, and has blue eyes; yet her whiteness does not protect her from dehumanization as Fanon discusses in his works. Instead, the postcolonial structures have been set up and sustained by the power systems that unknowingly require her to participate in upholding patriarchy in a capitalist culture. My mother also internalizes all these failures as her own. As I reflect, I see that her violence against me and my sister was not just personal, but very political because postcolonial theory shows patterns in the family that no longer constitute private family matters. So, by getting married, having children, and being a faithful Catholic, she reproduced the failures of the system that promised her safety, status, and love, but delivered only silence, shame, and invisibility.

Ultimately, this vignette reveals how white women in the U.S. suffer postcolonial violence when they are denied recognition and visibility within these imperial structures. This is

not just gendered violence, but rather a systemic and strategic, ongoing effort. The system designates the ones that are valued, visible, and viable in society. Postcolonialism continues to shape the everyday realities of white women who continue to face inequalities within domestic, reproductive, religious, and socioeconomic spheres, being vilified for their very human female essence. White women continue to occupy a dual position in postcolonial hierarchies, being both beneficiaries of privilege and victims of gender. . Like my mother's life and my own childhood demonstrates, when women fall outside the acceptable boundaries of femininity, productivity, and whiteness, they are left behind.

Vignette #3: When in Rome—Bhabha, Identity, Hybridity

> *… and he said, "Nancy Jane, when in Rome be Roman." Regardless of whether my dad could adapt to a new culture overnight, I found it to be a challenge. It was completely unacceptable for me to call soda, soder, or Miss Monica, Miss Monicer, or Dr. Pepper, Dr. Peppa, and so on. However, it was perfectly acceptable to mispronounce words with a Southern accent. For instance, saying Y'all instead of you all, bolled instead of boiled, and ol instead of oil! Yet, I was the one who had to assimilate into a culture that I was not from. I was expected to accept certain beliefs that went against my morals and when I did not, they considered me an outsider even without my accent…I felt betrayed. I did not belong.*

This vignette showcases the psychological tension that occurs when a child is forced to assimilate into a dominant culture, especially when that culture is unfamiliar, uninviting, and often contradictory. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and stereotype offers a framework for understanding how assimilation creates fractured identities, ongoing trauma, and contradiction.

Bhabha theorizes hybridity as a complex process of negotiation between cultures, in which the colonized or minority subject is required to perform an identity acceptable to the dominant group. However, this identity is always "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 2004, 122–23). In this moment, Little Nancy is expected to assimilate to Texan norms that contradict her native New York culture. She is mocked for her accent, policed in her language, and

misrecognized as defective, even though she is a straight-A student. When the school mandates speech therapy for her accent, it demonstrates the "subtle yet coercive ways" Bhabha observes in institutional systems like schools that reinforce cultural hierarchy and erase difference (55–56, 113–15).

Bhabha asserts that hybridity is not merely a blending of cultures but an "in-between space" of colonial tension, where the subject is caught in an ambivalent moment that produces exclusion, homogenization, psychological instability, and cultural erasure (Bhabha 2004, 55–56, 94–97, 113–15). Little Nancy's story exemplifies this. Even without an accent, her behavior, clothing, and appearance marked her as different. Her culottes, long dresses, and pale red skin were enough to code her as other in southern culture (54–56). Her peers made fun of her, and her teachers pathologized her cultural expression.

In Bhabha's (2004, 56–58) view, the violence of stereotype and cultural misrecognition functions as a colonial tactic to fix identity. The New Yorker is too loud. The outsider is not enough. Little Nancy, a non-colonized subject, still becomes a target for assimilation. Bhabha emphasizes that stereotype "fixes" identity in the postcolonial discourse, whereas hybridity destabilizes it. Bhabha calls this the metonymy of presence (37, 128–29). Little Nancy's conflict between her father's ease of adapting collides with her resistance. This exemplifies Bhabha's claim that the colonized subject is never fully inside or outside the dominant culture. She is both present and absent. She is expected to adapt but not fully accepted once she does. Bhabha's notion of the "missing person" also applies in this scene. Little Nancy who is displaced loses her social identity because of moving to Texas. Nancy was no longer a New York mofiuso and she certainly wasn't a Texan. In this liminal space, she again was emotionally abandoned. The psychological effects were deep internalization of being alienated by her family and culture. As

Bhabha states, the trauma of hybridity emerges from this inability to locate oneself within dominant narratives (74–75).

Culturally, this vignette emphasizes the deception of assimilation. If you live in Texas, then the culture is Texan. Cultural mispronunciations are acceptable, even favored. Speaking in "New York" simply isn't acceptable. It is hated and you are vile. This communicates more than double standards. It shows how stereotypes cause people to be misrecognized, misunderstood, not valued, stereotyped, and excluded. These cultural double standards shape how value is assigned to language, class, gender performance, and belonging. This created an uneven playing field, where Little Nancy's expressions of identity were always judged more harshly. Personally, I experienced this as an early lesson in survival. To belong meant to erase pieces of myself. It meant taming my voice, flattening my speech, softening my confidence, and questioning my roots. The distance between who I was and who I had to perform to be, hurt my developing sense of self. I learned how to be a Roman when in Rome, but the cost to me was alienation. This is postcolonial trauma. Though not colonized in the traditional sense, white American girls like me were and continue to be shaped by postcolonial systems. Capitalist patriarchy, cultural hierarchy demands conformity at the cost of identity. Assimilation is not neutral. It is a gendered and racialized project rooted in imperial ideology. As Bhabha insists, these hybrid spaces are not sites of harmonious blending; they are contested zones of negotiation, surveillance, and psychic fragmentation. They shape us, wound us, and teach us early how difference becomes pathology in the eyes of the dominant culture. The postcolonial lie is that the United States is not actually "united" and does not have a single culture, but many different ones! The United States is made up of several cultures, regions, dialects, it is not one identity but many, and those differences compete with each other. Even your New York background is not the New York that the Texans

imagined, because New York, too, is diverse and multiple. The United States is a settler-colonial union that exploits and hides its own postcolonial violences.

Vignette #4: Racism—Cultural and Religious Erasure

> *One of the first changes I wanted to implement was to distinguish my grandparents' identities without having to differentiate them by using their country of origin. I decided to call my Italian grandmother, 'big grandma' because she was super tall and large boned. I called my Jewish grandma 'little grandma' because she was very petite and short. Oh, by the way, I am Jewish. I just kind of found this out and it's a secret. I am not allowed to tell anyone that my mom is really a Jew, which makes me a Jew.*
>
> *For my little grandma, Christians were Christians, whether they were Protestant or Catholic. She did not curse Jews like the Italian side of my family. This was because she was an Ashkenazi Jew on her mother's side. Another secret about my little grandma is that she was a total racist. I have never seen anyone so frightened by Black people in my entire life; especially since she grew up in the so-called 'melting pot' of America, New York City. I never understood the reasoning behind her thinking. I would think she would have been more afraid of white supremacist Christian people. Despite my big grandma's antisemitic hostility towards Jews, she took me to church with her every day during the week when school was out for the summer.*

My father was a racist as well. As a matter of fact, he suffered a severe inferiority complex because he could not live up to upper class Italian culture. He lived among Puerto Rican families in a multicultural community. Because of this he was ostracized at work on a daily basis because he did not live up to the high standards of his peers. My father was deeply affected by his own community's subversive narratives that subliminally shaped what he thinks about race, power, agency, God, and his own self (Rogers 2011, chap. 4). He couldn't support his wife and children, couldn't afford a car or house payments, and was consumed by bar tabs and gambling markers. Still, he couldn't face himself. Also, it appears that my Italian family knew my mother was Jewish. I recall the story I was told about my parents' wedding, where after they were pronounced man and wife, my little grandma stepped on a glass in front of the entire Italian wedding party and Catholic priest. They all must have known about my grandmother's and mother's Jewish-Lithuanian heritage but chose to erase it.

This vignette of layered erasure and racism that exist both within the family and within broader religious and ethnic communities reveals the complex intersections of postcolonial violence and internalized oppression. Postcolonial theory helps frame these personal memories of mine as part of larger systemic structures that sustain domination through cultural, racial, and gendered erasure. As Bhabha (2004, 36, 94–97) argues, identity is never stable but instead shaped in moments of ambivalence, mimicry, and the colonial demand for assimilation. The secrecy surrounding my mother's Jewish identity forced silence upon her. This demonstrates Bhabha's notion of the "metonymy of presence," where identity is fragmented, displaced, and performed in relation to power rather than rooted in self-recognition. This erasure is a form of epistemic violence that, as Spivak might say, silences the marginalized people. In this scene, it is my maternal Jewish identity, passed down through my mother, grandmother, and her ancestors, that has been silenced, and erased, even at my parents' wedding.

This cultural silencing intersects with racist ideologies in the family, especially visible in my little grandmother's fear of Black people and my father's racial inferiority complex. These attitudes reflect what Maldonado-Estrada critiques as a form of racialized masculinity and postcolonial dominance exhibited by the men of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church (OLMC) in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The men of OLMC assert racial and ethnic privilege and dominance by excluding Haitians and Puerto Ricans from working in the money room for their religious parades and church business despite the parish's multicultural makeup. This exclusion functions as a postcolonial strategy of territorialism, in which white ethnic groups reassert dominance over others holding less power in the ethnic community (Maldonado-Estrada 2020, 170–74).

White women are not exempt from these systems of violence; rather, they are shaped by them, excluded by them, and sometimes complicit in sustaining them. My mother and grandmother in this vignette are erased as Jewish, denied their ethnicity, their histories, and their recognition as strong viable leaders and hard workers who fought for survival for their generation and future generations to come. Without their history and gumption, my sister and I would not have been born, and this heroic story was dismissed in her Catholic marriage, personal history, and cultural relevance and personhood, rendered culturally, historically, epistemologically, politically, religiously voiceless. My identity is similarly split, visible and invisible, Jewish and not-Jewish, White and not quite-white. I would add, not quite right.

It appears the family attempts to conform to Catholic and Italian standards of respectability; however, they themselves carry racist and patriarchal biases which sustain postcolonial and violence systems globally. This layered erasure contributes to a form of postcolonial trauma for white women in the U.S., who have not been colonized in the classical sense, but experience dispossession, non-recognition, and ideological fragmentation through ongoing systems of patriarchal and religious control. The refusal to speak about my grandmother and mother's Jewishness, the discomfort with racial others, and the gendered demands placed upon women in these communities collectively enact what Oliver calls the colonization of psychic space. This is the psychic impact of systemic silencing, where individuals, especially women, become disconnected from their histories, bodies, and voices (Oliver 2004, 4, 88–89).

Together, this vignette and theoretical analysis demonstrate how white women in the U.S. continue to be affected by systems of postcolonial violence through erasure, racism, religious exclusion, and family-based cultural oppression that echo the imperial legacies of classification, border policing, and domination.

Vignette #5: The Cake Walk

I could barely hold in my tears when my teachers would have the class sing happy birthday to me. I was not able to happily receive all the attention. One day, a few days after my eighth birthday, I saw my dad pulling up onto our very steep driveway. He got out of his car staggering… the cake flew out of his hands and splattered all over the porch. It was now a mess of crumbled confection; its layers blasted apart like a chaotic kaleidoscope of sugar and flour all over the place! I had around thirty minutes to clean up the mess before my mother got home.

Vignette #6: House and Grounds Keeper

My mother was so happy with my sister that she changed my sister's role in the family. She was promoted from being my keeper to being the housekeeper- and the groundskeeper. There was not a day that the house did not shine, inside or out. My sis made sure all the windows and screens were cleaned, the driveway was debrid of gunk, she swept the roof and cleaned out all the gullies, painted the walls, restored the lifeless wood floors, and pruned and mowed a ponderosa of grass and trees. In our minds, we now lived on a ranch.

Since my mother didn't do any housework, no cooking, no laundry, no dusting, she delegated it all to my sister. At just ten years old, Sally was the window washer, the cook, the laundromat attendant, the dog walker, the groundskeeper. She did everything. She didn't have time to finish her homework or enjoy being a child. My mother worked as a bank teller from nine to five, but she stayed out drinking every night. When she got home, she would literally pass out. My father was always gone. He was busy with his extermination business or gambling, and our house was still infested with fleas. We rarely saw him.

Culturally, this constituted child neglect and abuse, even in Texas. This vignette reflects how work was delegated in our family system. It was not through traditional parenting; it was a complete reconfiguration of gendered roles and power. Our mother disappears; my sister picks up her duties and becomes the official "woman" of the house at ten years old.

There are complicated dynamics going on in this scene. This wasn't simply a case of a parent being too busy or assigning a list of chores to be done by her children. It was a form of

familial exploitation shaped by patriarchy and postcolonial narratives that violate women and their children. When my mother took on the role of breadwinner, she gave up her responsibility as a mother and homemaker. My sister and I basically picked up where she left off.

Colonial violence and trauma have been adapted in the so-called postcolonial era. Spivak states that the "pattern of domination" is supported by a dominant gendered elite. She is referring to the oppression and violence of colonized women or women of color, which is historically and structurally distinct from what happened in our household (Spivak 2010b, 38–39). However, Spivak's theory helps me understand how systems of power do replicate themselves, even within white domestic spaces, through everyday performances of gendered labor, silence, and substitution. This illustrates how white women in the United States sustain these very violent and oppressive structures for women in the U.S. and for women of color globally. My mother, a white woman, acts as an intermediary which resonates with Spivak's native informants. Both groups of women are forced to choose between survival, silence, and complicity (Spivak 2010b, 38–42; Spivak 2010a, 253).

Vignette #7: Daddy–Daughter Date Night: Tick, Tock, Boom!

> *Then, my dad reaches into his jacket, pulls out a gun, points it at the television and fires. Boom, one bullet! For the second time in my life, I thought I was deaf! Only this time, I was just inches away from a madman who just released a single bullet from the chamber of a 357 magnum. Yep, our only television was destroyed, shattered in pieces like my eardrum*.

This scene is not just a domestic violence incident, but a wakeup call of how postcolonial violence enters the home, not through a uniformed militant male, but through a white American father whose life was shaped by the social, economic, and cultural fractures of imperial colonial systems. Fanon's theory on the psychopathology of colonialism helps frame the severity of this trauma. He argues that colonialism produces not just political oppression, but psychological

traumas that become deeply embedded in the unconscious as a means of survival and coping (Fanon 2008, 122–23).

Although Fanon focused primarily on the psychological trauma endured by colonized Black men, throughout his works he illustrates how colonial strategies persist through neocolonialism and the capitalist, racialized agenda of the West that exploit people across racial, class, and cultural lines (Fanon 2004, 26–28). Fanon argues that postcolonial violence is not a contradiction, but rather a continuation of colonial violence under new forms (Fanon 2008, xi).

Maldonado-Estrada surveys how a group of Catholic Italian laymen form religious bonds with other Italian men in the church parish through Catholic acts of devotion. Maldonado-Estrada's six-year ethnographic study was framed around a particular group of study subjects who are a group of Italian men who are parishioners of the Our Lady Mount Carmel (OLMC) Catholic Church. The men constructed a religious identity and masculinity through male bonding and allegiance to their one common goal: to make money to sustain the church (Maldonado-Estrada 2020, 6–7). Maldonado-Estrada claims that blood is connected inextricably to genetic ties which "confers an unchanging identity" which means membership only can form from within the white Catholic group (211). This furthers postcolonial ideologies that support male lineage succession that initiates men into manhood through domination which reinforces the notion of white male body supremacy, nationalism, and institutionalized patriarchy in the Catholic church (139). Catholic priest and scholar Richard Rohr states that men are "initiated" into manhood all too often. In his book, *From Wild Man to Wise Man*, he argues that men are often punished, challenged, and shamed into manhood; furthermore, the myth of modernity traps boys into romanticizing violence, power, and authority (Rohr 2005, 31).

This shows how postcolonial violence and trauma has been permeated into the fabric of society right here in the United States. Maldonado-Estrada's study subjects conducted themselves almost in the same manner as my own Italian Catholic male family members.

The scene in this vignette is not merely a domestic violence incident. Postcolonial violence today does not look the same that it did decades ago; at least not in this embodied experience of trauma and violence for me as a child. Postcolonial violence for white women in the United States doesn't always enter the home through a uniformed militant, it enters through the body of a white American dad whose life has been shaped by generational trauma and patriarchal mindsets that have been learned in white culture throughout history. When my father pulled a gun and fired it at the television after losing money gambling, it wasn't just about the game. It was about sustaining the lifeblood of the family, our ethnicity, values, and beliefs. The lifeblood of the family also came with debt, shame, inadequacy, and credible threats of violence and dominance over women, children, and anyone that owed them money, particularly those that did not pay back money they owed. The study subjects from Maldonado-Estrada's study mirrored my male Italian family. The men in my family gathered in a basement like the OLMC men; women were not invited, neither were the outsiders especially when it had to do with money. Outsiders were anyone that was not connected through brotherhood, inextricable ties to other men of the same religious and cultural ethnicity, who upheld patriarchal and hierarchical structures in their own homes and socialized male children in the same manner to ensure the lifeline of the family. Women were seen, not heard, their work was considered invaluable compared to men's work, and money was "sacred" to them because they needed to sustain the family.

The scene in this vignette is about my father's failures as a man. In such patriarchal systems, my father internalized violence that he inherited and re-enacted. Maldonado-Estrada reveals how the Italian Catholic men, like my father, are socialized into a form of masculinity rooted in domination, bloodlines, and financial control. Their value is tied to money, which equates with status, legitimacy, and power (Maldonado-Estrada 2020, 50–51, 106). Within this framework, women's labor is invisible, racial 'others' are excluded, and masculinity is passed down through blood and hierarchy (139, 210–11). Like colonizers, their singular goal is to maintain control and sustain their way of life.

Fanon's theory of the psychopathology of colonialism explains how this trauma is not an isolated incident, but a psychic injury embedded in the unconscious and inherited across generations (Fanon 2008, 122–23). Fanon's framework helps expose the way postcolonial systems of violence such as capitalism, patriarchy, and racial hierarchies, penetrate even the most intimate domestic spaces. My father wasn't just a man with a gun. He was a product of imperial structures that collapsed into our living room.

Bhabha theorized how *signification* leads to colonial ideologies that eventually start to feel normal or obvious because they become profoundly ingrained in our consciousness. It changes the way we see the world (Bhabha 2004, 36, 68–69). My father internalized the colonial system that repeated over and over again how he failed to meet the standards of the Western male. Bhabha's notion of stereotype offers a framework for analyzing how white women in the United States experience postcolonial violence in hidden, systemic forms. The gunshot was not a random accident. It was an extension of humiliation, emasculation, social failure, and capitalist disposability. My father could not live up to the dominant cultural ideals of manhood, power, and success that was built through Western imperial values of conquest, control, and ownership.

Since Bhabha's critique on postcolonial violence demonstrates that his theories extend beyond colonized people of color, even to the extreme of including colonizers, his work is detrimental for me to expand his theory to include white women in the U.S. that suffer from severe violence, metal abuse, and trauma which include collective and generational trauma. While his focus is racialized colonial violence, his core insight, that trauma is socially manufactured and politically useful, can be extended to understand how white women experience trauma in contemporary Western society through postcolonial structures like capitalism, patriarchy, legal erasure, and cultural silencing.

Vignette #8: Sins of the Father

> *All the men in my family believed the formation of the mafia was absolutely a necessity because the government controlled everything and held all the power." I could not accept my father's thoughts about God and sin. My dad used to tell me that mafia people who killed people for a living were forgiven by God because they went to confession. He said these men only killed the "bad" people, so it was essentially okay to murder. He also thought it was honorable to kill.*

Fanon (2008, 121) argues that colonialism creates a psychopathology in the Black colonized subject, resulting in deep psychological trauma that affects generations to come. Under constant white surveillance and militarized control, Black men are marked as inherently suspect and become projections of white fear through myths, stereotypes, and collective stories in which Fanon describes as a "collective catharsis" (124–25). Colonial discourse constructs the Black man as a "phobogenic object," which is someone who evokes fear simply by existing, leading to anxiety, inferiority complexes, and internalized masochism (130–34, 143). Over time, these stereotypes become so deeply embedded that the Black subject can no longer recognize his own identity (166–69). Although Fanon's work centers on black colonized subjects, his understanding into the psychopathology of violence can be applied to both the colonized and the colonizers. In Fanon's own words, "The misfortune of the man of color is having been enslaved. The

misfortune and inhumanity of the white man are having killed man somewhere" (205). Fanon's words about the white man resonate deeply when I reflect on my father, who was socialized within patriarchal and colonial systems of dominance. These violent structures are clear indicators of deep postcolonial legacies that ultimately contributed to his own psychological deterioration. My father and his circle of friends internalized colonial logic so thoroughly that they began to inflict violence on their own white community. And yet, this violence was not seen as criminal or destructive. Like colonialism, this violence was rationalized, normalized, and even sanctified by the very postcolonial structures that shaped it.

Fanon's insistence that colonial violence fosters internalized alienation, this gives language for what I witnessed by my father (Fanon 2008, 206). While Fanon framed violence as a potentially revolutionary response to colonial dehumanization, the violence in my vignette is neither liberating or redemptive (Fanon 2004, 25). It is not an act of resistance; it is pure violence. It is inherited, normalized, and deeply embedded in structures shaped by capitalist oppression, racism, sexism, and patriarchal dysfunction. According to Fanon's work, this scenario is an active symptom of the psychopathology of colonialism. My father, due to postcolonial violence and domination, turned inward on his family and white community creating a cascade of his own psychopathology, validating a deep inferiority complex.

Fanon argues that when the colonized person fails to act or resist through *meaningful* engagement, acts of violence become distorted. This cycle can remain and reinforce the very systems of oppression that sustain these postcolonial systems in the U.S. and globally (Fanon 2004, 22–25). Fanon's understanding of violence illustrates how meaning can become disordered and pathologized for *both* the colonized and, indirectly, the colonizer. Bhabha and Fanon's body of work exemplifies that postcolonial systems, structures, and authorities maintain power by

creating and reinforcing harmful stereotypes, myths, and ideologies that become deeply embedded in our consciousness. This vignette reveals how both the colonizer and the colonized are psychologically shaped by violence, though they may express their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs in very different ways.

This vignette thoroughly also reveals how my father's thinking was completely distorted and his actions substantiated this. My father's behavior highlights how binary thinking, a colonial strategy, upholds hierarchical structures. By contrasting one thing against another, binaries reduce meaning to unyielding classifications. They take away the in-between moments of intricacy and diversity of the human experience. My father held on to these binaries which gave him a false sense of power and superiority, just enough to temporarily silence his feelings of inadequacy (Bhabha 2004, 69; Sandoval 2000, 92–96).

When my father told me that it is right and just in God's eyes for good people to kill bad people, he had no concept of what was in between good and bad. He had no way to justify right and wrong or how God judged between the two. Deeply embedded ideological narratives such as the myths of race, superiority, and power contributed to my father's demise. The lies that he internalized, grounded by postcolonial discourse, twisted his sense of reality and morality. Colonial systems construct irrational, but *persuasive* narratives that end up being construed as truth and knowledge.

Binary distinctions, according to Bhabha, inhabit a space of ambivalence, where identities are unstable and constructed through mimicry, fear, and resistance. This demonstrates how my father's one-dimensional way of moving through daily life resulted in deeply shaped colonial and patriarchal behavioral patterns. As Fanon and Bhabha suggest, the "everyday" is a site where colonial ideologies are both rehearsed and resisted. It is where these inherited systems

of religious, patriarchal, and racial dominance are normalized, often without question (Bhabha 2004, 28–31; Fanon 2004, 15, 109–110).

My father's rigid thinking, moral confusion, and detachment from truth reflect internalized postcolonial structures of dominance. In Orientalism, Said argues that colonial power operates discursively in which truth becomes fabricated through repeated images, language, and texts that constructed the Orient through Western ideologies and stereotypes (Young 2016, 387–89). Bhabha extends this by theorizing that mixed signals of signs are ambivalent. Meaning becomes unstable through semiotic slippage, the excess of difference (Bhabha 2004, 68–69, 75–76). Signs like masculinity, honor, and good versus evil, are never fixed. Yet in my father's imagination, they appeared natural and true. His worldview, shaped by colonial myths and repetition, confused ideology with truth. This framework shows how postcolonialism sustains itself through generations, cultures, and religion, deeply embedding the repetition of colonial myths in the minds of those who are unaware of its strategies and tactics.

Subsequently, Fanon vehemently rejects any claims that inferiority complexes and feelings of alienation existed *prior* to colonialism. He insists that the social and political environment produced by the colonial situation triggered an emergence of the pathology of inferiority (Fanon 2008, 66). Fanon's theory demonstrates that racism and stereotype was indeed a larger system that was enacted and sustained through colonialism, history, and a Western episteme. Therefore, Fanon insists that inferiority complexes are not just psychological disorders that certain individuals or groups suffer from (xv, 66, 69). For Fanon, colonial violence is not just a mere coincidence or a typical psychological response; but rather an action that has been radically motivated by dominant power structures in our societies and cultures which do not rely on a specific race or gender; all people are affected (70).

My father's worldview was shaped by race, religion, and the Italian bloodline. His thinking was not just distorted; it was learned within a system that justified and reinforced the legacy of postcolonialism that governed his and other male family members masculine identities. Fanon (2008, 122–23) argues that these patriarchal colonial ideologies lead to long term mental health issues that are pushed deep into the unconscious. They remain embedded in the psyche until they reemerge and are often described as psychological and generational trauma (122–23).

The codes of honor he lived by were not grounded in universal ethics, but in an unknown allegiance to a family name, religion, and masculinity. These ideals were handed down generationally, masked as tradition, but ultimately saturated in patriarchal power and racialized pride. His cultural and religious formation mirrored the very structures that Maldonado-Estrada reveals in her work in which culture, religion, politics, and race collide.

Maldonado-Estrada's (2020, 190, 210) ethnographic study showed how the Italian men from OLMC Church exhibited generational psychopathological problems rooted in colonial ideologies that led them to embody a masculine identity that centered around their physical endurance and appearance. Rooted in what they call the "lifeblood of the parish," their brotherhood is sustained through ritualized male bonding and using their bodies as a tool of strength, unity, and generational sacrifice (37, 43).

Power structures within OLMC are inherently postcolonial. Power is social, racial, political, economic, gendered, classed, and inherited. Maldonado-Estrada's male study subjects took on certain roles at their annual feast. The roles assigned to the OLMC men depended on their position and standing in the community and church. To be the number one "capo" is to embody the Turk; it is considered the highest honor among the men who labor for the feast (Maldonado-Estrada 2020, 53). Taking up the Turkish sword during the event enacts a symbolic

reenactment of racial, ethnic, and religious otherness. Through roleplaying, these men idolize and appropriate the identities of those historically cast as outsiders or even enemies; yet, like colonialists, they never relinquish their power. Instead, this "performance of the Other" strengthens their masculine Catholic identity by showcasing the difference and otherness within and outside their own hierarchy (50). The Italian men's family legacy, physical capacity, and patriarchal lineage is how they determine their level of respect in their family and the community, with the highest honors going to McClintock's "family of man." The men are white, married, heterosexual fathers with long-standing commitments to the community (145). This masculine order mirrors postcolonial domination and violence enacted through devotional performance, valuable men's work, and exclusionary authority.

Vignette #9: Medical Violence—Pathologizing Females

> *All of a sudden, I felt a massive vice across my chest that grew tighter and tighter. Luckily, I pulled over and put my car in park just a moment before I was lifeless in the driver's seat*.

When I came to, paramedics were surrounding me. I was taken by ambulance to the hospital where I worked. The medical staff there treated me with professionalism and a sense of urgency. I trusted them. After a full cardiac evaluation, I was discharged that same night. They diagnosed me with an "enlarged heart." The doctors told me it was nothing to worry about. But many of the nurses I worked with told me a different story. They urged me to seek another opinion, warning that this was a serious medical condition for either older people or someone my age. Still, I believed the doctors.

Oliver's (2004, 42–43) argument extends her analysis of Fanon's psychopathology of colonialism to include non-colonized white complicit women in the United States who have been caught in the intersections of patriarchal oppression and sexism associated with neo-colonial

systems of violence in healthcare. Oliver explains that in the nineteenth century, the name for the medical disease associated most frequently with white women was called "hysteria," which was a term heavily gendered with colonial and patriarchal ideology. By the twentieth century, she said it was renamed as anxiety and depression (101). Oliver states that depression was inconclusively linked to an imbalance of female hormones, which could cause mood swings, irritability, passive aggression, and a lack of sex drive according to the National Mental Health Association (101). This diagnosis led to women to be treated for psychological illnesses with drugs and or shock therapy (101–2).

After my cardiac arrest, no one told me to follow up with a cardiologist. When symptoms returned, palpitations and chest pain, I went to my family doctor. He listened to my heart, told me everything was fine, and prescribed medications I never asked for. I had no diagnosis of anxiety or depression, yet I was sent home with tranquilizers, sleeping pills, and painkillers. My chest pain was dismissed. I was dismissed.

In the 1980s, a young white woman with cardiac symptoms should have received emergency level care. Instead, I was minimized, told to lose weight, eat better, and exercise more. I weighed 130 pounds and exercised regularly. It was clear that as a woman, I was expected to endure, adapt, and not question medical authority. But I did question it. I started researching on my own and I refused to let shame stop me from continuing to search for the real cause of my medical issues. Back then, medical reference books weren't accessible to non-professionals. You could read them in-library but not check them out. So, I camped out in the medical library. I memorized the *Physician's Desk Reference* and *The Merck Manual* like they were sacred texts.

Vignette #9A: Heart Failure

> *By the time I was seventeen years old, I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, lupus, obstructive pulmonary disease, primary immune deficiency, stage one kidney failure, ulcerative colitis, inflammatory joint disease, gastritis, stomach ulcers, and Crohn's disease.*

Eventually, I found doctors who listened and ran tests. It wasn't easy. It still isn't. Managing these chronic conditions is a full-time job. My story is not unusual. Then and now, women's symptoms are too often dismissed as psychological. A woman's credibility about her own body is still under siege today in the United States.

As I write this, I am hospitalized for another cardiac event. I called 911 for chest pain and severe hypertension. When EMTs arrived, they dismissed me the moment they saw me walking outside. My building is hard to access, and no one knew where to enter. I tried to help by meeting them on the street. At that moment, I felt I would be safer if I had collapsed in plain view rather than being alone in my apartment. The system doesn't see us until we're on the ground in full view. The paramedic hooked me up to a heart monitor, took my blood pressure, which was elevated, declared that it looked normal, then pulled off the electrode leads. I knew I was *not* fine. I felt fifty shades of shame; having ten men standing over me as I confronted Fanon's pervasive "gaze," which defined and negated me because, presumably, I was fine (Fanon 2008, 128).The hospital's immediate intervention however showed I had extremely elevated blood pressure, cardiac enzymes, and a very abnormal electrocardiogram which confirmed a cardiac muscle injury and the need for emergency medical assistance.

Even with good intentions, medical professionals today are still steeped in cultural assumptions about gender, pain, and credibility. Oliver's work shows how the patriarchal structure of medical epistemology operates through postcolonial systems. Her work reveals how white women in the United States experience postcolonial violence and trauma because the

female patient is subjugated to the presumed objectivity of Western hegemonic dominated science. Medical libraries symbolized this epistemic gatekeeping: knowledge was power, and that power wasn't shared equally.

Butler and Athanasiou's work on dispossession also apply here. They argue that some lives are socially and politically pre-configured as more valuable than others. Identity is predefined through postcolonial strategies that determine who is worthy of care and recognition. As a female, I was socially and medically dispossessed long before I entered the ambulance. Butler and Athanasiou clearly show how certain populations are not seen as viable until the system deems us so. In my case, I was disposable until I had clinical proof of this illness, which forced recognition (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 15).

Their theory of recognition helps expose how I was first dispossessed of credibility, then conditionally re-admitted into care once institutional evidence allowed it. The message was clear. Without any proof, I was not believable; I was not worthy of attention. Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 18–21) describe this as disposability and precarity, induced inequality where even my own survival had to pass through systemic validation. Institutional violence naturally extends into other more precarious forms of exploitation, manifesting clearly through reproductive violence and control of women's bodies by systems shaped by postcolonial dominance violence, and epistemic subjugation.

These vignettes have shown that postcolonial systems produce gendered violence against white women by reinforcing domination, silencing, and epistemic erasure. By including white women's experience, my research expands the postcolonial framework to show the complexities and divergencies in colonial power and cultural and gendered representation. Having to pass through the very institutions that harmed me in order to survive them began in early childhood

and continues today. The next vignette shows how white women in the United States experience reproductive violence.

Vignette #10: Do No Harm

> *I put the gown on and I sat up on the side of the table still crying profusely. The next thing I know, a male doctor walks in holding a syringe in his hand. He looked at me and said, "Honey, stop crying. I am going to cure you today!".... The next thing I know, I awoke. The lights in the room were dimmed. I saw an intravenous line in my arm. My heart sank in horror, and I did not need to ask. I immediately knew the life inside me was gone. I have never felt such loss. I could not speak. I could not yell. The feeling was inexplicable.*

Fanon (2008, 111–13, 187-88) foregrounded recognition as a racialized ontological struggle between the colonized and the colonizer which was completely dehumanizing for Black individuals. Similarly, Butler and Athanasiou state that even within liberal modern-day democracies as in the United States, subjugated white individuals must psychologically internalize hegemonic norms in order to be seen. Survival depends upon these norms even though they erase, devalue, and pathologize women (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 4, 76–79). Butler and Athanasiou expound on Fanon's work by offering a broader framework of systemic violence and ontological dispossession that applies not only to the racially colonized, but also to those who live under the normalized oppressions of so-called liberal democracies. Their analysis includes gendered, sexualized, classed, and disabled bodies whose recognition is always conditional, political, and dehumanizing (55–56, 78–79).

My own recognition was shaped by my own ontological struggle which was not about racism as Fanon represents; my encounter with postcolonial violence was deeply sexualized. My lived experience of being both the oppressed and sexualized object, made me so invisible that I fell through all the cracks, through all the systems that misrecognized me and completely denied my voice, my humanity, and my dignity. In that moment when I awoke in silence, knowing the

life inside me was gone, I only became re-visible through extreme violence and loss. Loss of myself, the life inside me, the loss of any self-respect I had. I was reduced to a mere body, no longer fully human. I did not feel human any longer. I felt like a monster, evil ugly filth. I alienated myself from my own self in pure hatred and disgust. That was my moment of complete dispossession.

This vignette marks my own ontological crisis, one that describes alienation, dehumanization, domination, and total loss. It confirms what my research explores; that white women in the United States, although complicit and not colonized, still experience postcolonial violence through institutional patriarchal and postcolonial systems that exist in different forms today. They still demand our compliance and silence. We truly are often forced to seek justice or care from structures that erase us even as they claim to protect us. I had no recourse to take against this doctor, the institution, or this establishment; for I would have not only silenced myself and degraded myself further, and most likely would not have survived this trauma and heartache. Remember, survival has to pass through systemic validation, and I was already dispossessed of any credibility. I had no proof. I was not believable (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 18–21).

I can also relate my experience to McClintock's (1995, 97) argument that under empire, women's bodies are treated as disposable; either they were valuable or not depending on their role within colonial power structures. In my case, the value of my body was not determined by my humanity, but rather how I fit into colonial logic. McClintock's theory proves true in my lived experience. My white female body remains central to sustaining the postcolonial project because it is not simply about othering, it is about real systemic violence enacted through institutions that claim to protect while they dominate.

McClintock's argument also converges with Spivak's critique of epistemic violence and gendered exploitation. Spivak (2010b, 26, 35–37) connects psychological trauma to the silencing of subaltern voices, particularly through epistemic violence, which is the erasure of entire systems of knowledge and self-representation. Spivak's concept of epistemic violence speaks directly to the trauma I experienced in that exam room. Spivak (36–37) explains how the British codification of Hindu law functioned as a form of epistemic violence that deprived colonized women of agency, language, and historical presence. For Spivak (37), the subaltern becomes the "silent, silenced center" who is rendered unintelligible and invisible by legal and institutional systems that claim to protect her, but actually erase her.

I believe this is exactly what happened to me. I walked into a clinic seeking information and counseling but left with a life taken from my body without my consent. In this embodied experience, I was truly not allowed to speak and was without a doubt not heard. A doctor who I never met before, literally walked into my room and injected me with a drug that knocked me completely out. There was no consultation with any doctor, no counseling, and no exam performed as promised. My refusal was not documented. I became, as Spivak writes, a body acted upon, not a subject with will, history, or representation.

Spivak vehemently contests the role of the "native informant" who she argues speaks on behalf of others. She argues that these individuals are completely aligned with the dominant systems who will actually be the voice for the marginalized; hence, the powers speak in their own language and in their own framework of power without the voice or consent of the other (Spivak 2010b, 38). In my case, the medical institution became a native informant interpreting my voice through its own agenda. My pain and tears were translated as irrational emotion. My cries for help translated into telling me not to cry because I was cured of this "problem."

Spivak (2010b, 41) states that when sexual differences are illuminated but not understood, the gendered subaltern is erased and left without historical presence or identity. That moment in the medical room was the complete erasure of my identity. The reproductive violence I experienced was not only physical, but it was also epistemic, emotional, and ontological. I was reduced to nothing. I was violated under the guise of care, and dispossessed. For Spivak (38–39), the subaltern cannot speak, not because she lacks voice, but because her voice cannot be heard within the terms of dominant discourse. That was my reality. I did speak. I cried. I said no. But the institution refused to hear me, and in that refusal, I became invisible.

As Spivak (2010b, 50, 56) argues, white colonial men claimed to be on a civilizing mission to save "brown women from brown men." In my situation, white colonial educated American men were on a mission to save white women from themselves. Spivack's (57–58) main argument is that once you give in to any type of imperialist patriarchal ideologies consciously or unconsciously, it gives all the rights and power to males and the gendered subaltern is silenced. The fact is that the gendered subaltern is denied her voice, erased, and silenced.

Spivak (2010b, 62) recounts the real-life suicide of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, who hanged herself as a deliberate act of resistance in hopes of being heard instead of taking part in a political assassination. She timed her suicide to be during her menses so she would not be misread as a victim of rape or an illegitimate pregnancy (63). Her menstruating body was the message. For Spivak, this act was a final attempt to speak not only for herself, but for a countless number of women who are erased by postcolonial discourse everyday (42).

When I was going through my own tragic experience, I really felt that no one truly heard me, including supportive friends, family members, therapists, and religious clergy. I was told

how I should feel. I reached a point where I considered ending my life because I desperately needed someone to understand the depth of my grief, horror, and emptiness. I needed the pain to be seen, to be recognized. I felt completely alone and dead inside. Hopelessness does not even capture it. I was hollowed out. This hollowing is part of what Spivak calls epistemic violence, when a woman's pain, words, and existence are overwritten by institutional systems of power that refuse to recognize her as a knowing subject. I made it through this literal hell by encountering God in a deeply transcendent experience; but I almost didn't. The problem is that many other women don't make it out alive, like Bhubaneswari Bhaduri.

Vignette #11: The Men

Vignette #11A: The First Man

> *As I entered my early twenties, my illnesses continued. I was sick, alone, and lost sight of all my goals. I felt very discouraged. I looked for love but found it in all the wrong places. I had four experiences of male dominated violence which included sexual and physical assault, and kidnapping. I was held captive three times by three different men. The first man was a long-term partner of mine. He was a respected member of our community…*

The first man that I was assaulted by was my long-term partner. We were in a committed and monogamous relationship for over one year. He became ultra-violent and abusive when I questioned his fidelity. He immediately dominated me, controlled me, and took ownership of my body and mind which parallels McClintock's arguments on postcolonial violence to women. I was confronted with militant force and confined to the space I was in. It led me to become extremely silent and submissive. I knew I was under attack. I had to remain calm showing him I was not a threat by "negotiating conflicted gendered engagements" in order to escape the sexual and domestic battery that was happening (McClintock 1995, 6, 14).

As McClintock argues, I myself occupied a contradictory position- despite being racially privileged, white and complicit. In this horrifying moment, I was confined to sexual duties and

obedience for what lasted for hours, truly being in the middle of the "cult of domesticity" (McClintock 1995, 6). McClintock insists that these are not isolated acts of violence; they are embedded in postcolonial logic. She asserts that sexuality is just a "trope for power relations" which is a red flag for "abiding aspects of imperial power" (14). The personal became political. My abuse was not just physical; it was epistemic, symbolic, and cultural.

Vignette #11B: The Second Man

> *The second man was also a long-term monogamous partner. He was a business executive I worked with on projects. He held me at gunpoint with a shotgun when I refused to cooperate in a sexual and lewd act. He ended up committing suicide with the rifle hours later.*

In this moment of terror, the power this man had was not just physical. It was the kind of power that marked my body again as a site of conquest and possession, reduced to either submission or punishment. His threat did not come out of nowhere. It was embedded in an entire system of male entitlement and sexualized dominance that has been sanctioned, romanticized, and reproduced through the very narratives that construct patriarchal and postcolonial identity.

Said argues how the West represented the Orient, which was deeply sexualized, feminized, and exoticized, creating fantasies of domination and availability (Said 1979, 207). Said notes travelers and novelists said, "Women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy.… They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (207). These are not just images of women in the East. These stereotypes have grown, are globally imposed and have reached white women in the United States. At that moment I realized that my refusal to be "willing" rendered me not just disobedient, but punishable. The shotgun was not merely a weapon, but rather a postcolonial symbol of what happens when women reject male domination.

McClintock (1995, 14) expands on this dynamic by showing how colonial narratives didn't just sexualize Eastern women but constructed all women's bodies through domestic and sexual ideologies. Cultural texts like travel brochures, novels, advertisements, films, and even *maps*, did not just reflect male fantasies; rather they created real systems of expectation, entitlement, and threat. In his world, I was not supposed to say no. My body, like the bodies of women in imperial discourse, was assumed to be this property (5, 14).

Bhabha (2004, 110–12) theorizes that colonial dominance relies on repetition, the continual re-enactment of stereotypes that reproduce both the authority and the instability of the colonizer. His power was never stable. On that particular night, I saw it shatter. His sexual violence, the shotgun, the threat and the demand for compliance, was a desperate attempt to assert control over me. His suicide was not just a personal crisis; it was the collapse of an identity that was built on fragile colonial and patriarchal myths of superiority which destroyed him.

I could not yet name what was happening at that time. I only knew fear and powerlessness. I blamed myself for something that I could not foresee. I could not understand how I arrived at such a violent impasse. Looking back through the lens of postcolonial theory, I can see the layers. His control over me was not just emotional or circumstantial. It was systemic, culturally reinforced, and historically patterned. It was a repetition of the colonial script, domination, refusal, collapse.

Vignette #11C: The Third Man

> *The third man was a co-worker who I had no relationship with whatsoever; it was purely professional. He held me captive in his car on an out-of-town business trip for almost twelve hours*.

I was eighteen years old. I just got licensed to sell insurance, annuities, and bonds *and* I just got hired by a large financial company that is still going strong today! My manager sent me on an assignment with another colleague to learn the business. I was very eager and excited about working in this field, being in a 'man's' world. At first everything was going great. My new colleague and I drove to people's homes who lived in rural places, at least three hours from a metropolis. We went to five client's homes, pitched the sale, made the sale, and were on our way back to the city; but my colleague decided that he did not want to let me go. The problem with this man was he did not say anything, he just kept driving into more rural areas. When I asked him where we were going, he remained silent. I did not know if he was going to sexually assault me and leave me in the desert, kill me, or both. All I knew was that he would not drive back to the city or let me out of his car.

The culture I am from, being a white female, blonde, complicit, privileged by race, subjugated by gender, has always been subject to scrutiny. I was being held against my will, and I could not stop thinking about how I may have led him on somehow. I double checked my clothing. I was dressed in business attire, black slacks and a blue button up dress shirt. I even wore flat shoes! I kept trying to figure out if I did anything that may have suggested I was sexually interested in him. I was more concerned about what I did or what I may have done rather than having more concern for my well-being and safety. This is what eighties culture did to white women, shamed them into believing everything was their fault, that all females were seductresses; the culture in the eighties made us second guess our very existence.

McClintock (1995, 62) discusses Bhabha's theory of mimicry, which she states is not just a discursive strategy or theoretical ambivalence; it operates as a lived, imposed identity, where

colonized or non-colonized subjects, particularly women, are forced to "mirror back" distorted images of themselves shaped by colonial and patriarchal power.

Vignette #11D: Kidnapped

> *I finally convinced him that we should go to Las Vegas to have a little 'fun' so he changed his trajectory and drove to the airport. When we got there, I ran to the ticket counter and told the female ticket agent I was being held against my will and to call the police. My kidnapper followed me in and convinced her that we were just having a "little argument" and calling the police was not necessary. She believed him. She obeyed him. Then, this co-worker tried to take me back into his car that was double parked outside the loading zone, dragging me by the arm as I shouted, yelled, and begged for someone to call the police. Then the ticket agent called security and I was safe*.

McClintock (1995, 62) critiques Bhabha's analysis of mimicry, arguing that he does not account for the gendered dynamics or the consequences of mimicry as Bhabha delivers. McClintock is concerned that placing too much focus on the ambiguities of mimicry can agree with colonial discourse by 'normalizing" hierarchies of race, class, and gender (63). In this way, both Bhabha and McClintock explore how myths of cultural unity, hybridity, and mimicry sustain colonial ideologies; however, McClintock argues for a deeper gendered consciousness of how these processes develop within domestic and sexual spheres under male dominance (63–64).

Chandra Mohanty extends this work by exposing how some feminists construct false narratives of unity. Mohanty (1996, 172) argues that the Western academy uses textual strategies that effectively "codify and appropriate" knowledge by constructing the homogenized figure of the "Third World woman." For Mohanty, many feminist scholars generalize identities which erases the complex realities of women in the Global South (173). Mohanty provides insightful and critical commentary in which she rightly challenges the Western feminist production of the "Third World woman" (173). Mohanty contends that homogenizing the experiences of marginalized women further reinforces their oppression under the guise of feminist solidarity (173). There was no solidarity between me and the female ticket agent at the airport. I ran to her

and told her to call the police immediately because I was being held against my will and needed help. Then the perpetrator approaches and tells her we just had a little fight. She followed my 'kidnappers' orders, *not* to call the police.

My experience mirrors Mohanty's argument that females are already positioned as victims in which an ethnocentric universalism is produced and appropriated by postcolonial discourse. For Mohanty, this constructs women primarily as victims under male control. This female ticket agent could not recognize my identity, my voice, what was actually happening to me in real time because of the obscurity of white female cultural complexity that parallels postcolonial gendered violence to non-colonized white women (Mohanty 1996, 178). I believe that Mohanty's rejection of a universal sisterhood applies to my lived experience because it erased or invalidated my cultural specificity and the diverse lived experiences of women across different global and cultural contexts (175–77). This ticket agent was so indoctrinated by postcolonial normalism, that she was blind to a woman being held against her will.

In 1980s culture, white women didn't talk about this kind of stuff. If you were in a sexual relationship with a male, any sex you had was consensual. If you got in a car with a male, any male, it was consensual. If you did not get shot by a man holding a rifle to your head, it was fortunate.

Vignette #12: Inevitable Rapids Ahead

> *The next thing I know he sits down at our table, uninvited of course, and starts to play barbies with my daughter. I was impressed with all his barbie talk; frankly, it was the best pick up line that I have ever heard in my life! Sparks flew and we were married six months later*.

Bhabha contends that postcolonial exploitation operates not only through material or political domination, but through deeply embedded systems of cultural representation and identity construction (Bhabha 2004, 122–23). Colonial power produced hierarchies based on

race, gender, class, religion, and culture in which they persist in postcolonial contexts through ambivalent and hybrid forms. Bhabha contends that exploitation is maintained through the discursive production of subjectivities that are simultaneously included and excluded, mimicked, normalized, and rejected (122–23).

At the time, my knight in shining armor had appeared, it was charming, definitely cinematic. A man who wasn't afraid to sit down in front of all his friends and connect with a child, revealing his own feminine side and vulnerability had to mean that he wanted to show his emotional complexity; however, I was not ignorant to the fact that this man was demonstrating his playful prowess in front of his "boys" which only attracted me to him more for having the nerve to do so. Basically, he was not afraid of making a fool out of himself. That moment was disarming and magnetic. However, in retrospect, his performance was an expertly timed gesture that blended masculinity with sensitivity in a way that mimicked the cultural ideal of the "safe man."

The narrative had already been written. This is all about a patriarchal romance built on layered myths about gender, safety, love, and femininity. I did not see danger. I saw a man who "got it." I didn't recognize the warning signs beneath the tenderness.

For Bhabha, postcolonial domination is not solely sustained by oppression or violence, it is sustained discursively. Bhabha (2004, 122) writes, "The discourse of post-Enlightment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false. If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce." What Bhabha is asserting is that colonial power sustains itself in and through mimicry which is one of the most effective postcolonial strategies (122). Bhabha observes Said's notion of a retention that exists within the postcolonial that makes a demand for identity, change, and difference (122). In

Bhabha's words, mimicry is never simply imitation, but rather a strategy of colonial power that produces a subject that is "almost the same, but not quite" (122).

I can see now that this man's performance was "almost the same" as love, but it was not love. It was a form of coerced intimacy that blurred the lines between care and control. In this cultural moment, he simultaneously reinforced gendered hierarchies. In this moment, he positioned me directly in the postcolonial Western imaginary, a white woman as subjects and objects of desire, especially within domestic, romantic, and maternal narratives.

Vignette #12A: What Could Go Wrong?

> *Then, everything fell apart. How could I have missed all the red flags? We were completely in love, both Catholic, both committed to a life-long monogamous marriage, we both wanted to have a child and raise our families together… He was a super talented athlete with big dreams. He was smart, extraordinarily healthy, educated, and he loved working in sports. What could go wrong?*

From my own embodied experiences thus far, this type of postcolonial dominance manifests itself in pure violence, domestic violence, reproductive violence, religious and institutional violence, political violence, ecological violence, epistemic violence, and collective and generational trauma.

Vignette #12B: It Betrays Us

> *Being a successful career woman and a single mother was not enough for me. I had to have the total package which is the expectation for all truly successful women…. Society tells us so; it defines and dictates the meaning of success. Then, it betrays us.*

McClintock contends that Bhabha's abstract theories overlook the material realities of gendered subjugation. For her, the "failure" of mimicry is not simply a site of subversive resistance but a "social mask" that reproduces colonial hierarchies under the illusion of sameness, ultimately undermining the political strategy of representation (McClintock 1995, 62–63).

McClintock (1995, 44) keenly focuses on the invention of gender and the institutionalization of the family as concrete, rather than abstract realities of imperial control. She fully correlates postcolonial violence and trauma to both colonized and uncolonized women who have been subordinated by male domination and placed within what she calls the "organic family" of imperialism (45). In this structure, the cult of domesticity fully functions as a disciplinary unit which controls women's bodies, sexuality, and labor in and outside the family reinforcing imperial, economic, and political power (47). Like Said, she argues that Western science and Darwinism solidified racial and gendered ideologies and hierarchies by masking them as objective truths (37).

Even after I climbed my way up the professional ladder against the odds, against the odds of single motherhood, and against the shadows of violence and past trauma, I still did not feel complete. I still wasn't "enough." It wasn't because I lacked confidence or ambition. It was because the dominant culture had already written the script for what a white woman's life should look like. It was not just about being successful, or being married, or being a mother, or being heterosexual; this is all consequential to the pre-written narrative that exists. It includes the binary which is intentionally steeped in the difference, the mixed, ambivalent, and transgressive nature of postcolonial violence and oppression.

Having a successful career surely has consequences. Being a mother has consequences. Being married has consequences. Being monogamous and faithful has consequences. Being heterosexual has consequences. In postcoloniality, being a female has consequences. Being female demands grace, sexual availability, and a smiling domestic front. It also demands a subservient professional front where you actually *are* performing women's work, even if you did not know it. Being a white complicit female sustains postcolonialism by continuing to operate in

the center of the myth of constructed identity, hybridity, and ambiguity, where postcolonial power resides hidden in plain sight.

Vignette #12C: Failed

> *I ended up marrying my own compulsive gambling, lying, drinking, cheating, bum, in my mother's words, of course…It is extremely hard to admit, especially after years of deeply criticizing my mother, that I repeated the familial cycle of generational dysfunction… I could not escape my past. I was at the homestretch of escaping the generational cycle of shame, but it still caught up with me and pulled me under. In theory, I failed*.

Building on Oliver's work, the psychic colonization of space operates not only through exclusion, but through the psychopathological consequence of being and living *within* the normative. Normativity is a postcolonial script. Gendered systems of power work to create flawed subjects, particularly including white identifying heterosexual women, whose identities are constructed through pathological frameworks that entrap them and their stereotypical notions of worth (Oliver 2004, 112–15). Gendered systems of power do not simply marginalize women; they construct flawed subjects, especially white women, by pathologizing their emotional responses, sexual identities, and bodily autonomy. Fanon (2008, 24–25) observes how stories like Tarzan and other tales of adventure were written by white men which represented Black and Indian men as being evil and savage: however, the binary to this postcolonial narrative is that white men are heroic, safe, honest, holy, and gentle. White women's identity has been shaped by patriarchal, racialized, sexualized, and capitalist ideals of self-worth which also includes their emotional consensus about their exterior physical appearance. Oliver argues that women are produced as defective subjects through structures that define femininity as inherently unstable, irrational, or excessive (Oliver 2004, 112–15). The system was designed for white women to aspire to its norms so it could sustain postcolonial dominance and power. Internalized emotional

and physical shaming can no longer function as a temporary emotion; it becomes an ontological condition that roots itself in one's very being (112–15).

Continuing to expand on Oliver's work, I argue that *white, non-colonized women* are taught that their world views are normative. As previously stated, the larger problem in this research dissertation reveals that postcolonialism is often disregarded as something in the past, a historical artifact outside of academic discussions. Many white Western women fail to recognize the ongoing effects of postcolonialism in their own cultural context or how these dynamics may relate to their own lived experiences. I argue that the rigid binary framework is a distinguishing feature of postcoloniality for white women in the United States.

White complicit and colonized women in the U.S. are taught that their world views *are* the norm. This is the reason why white women fail to recognize the ongoing effects of postcolonialism in their own cultural context or how these dynamics may relate to their own lived experiences. I argue that the rigid binary framework is a distinguishing feature of postcoloniality for white-identifying women in the United States. These distinctive structures and systems construct a false sense of femininity through the repetition of the stereotypes that end up trapping white women through false notions of self-worth. My own embodied experience within these postcolonial systems shaped my own identity through a gendered, racialized, and economic lens (Oliver 2004, 112–15). White women like myself remain subject to patriarchal authority, heteronormative scripts, and impossible standards of femininity.

Vignette# 12D: Generational Trauma

> *I repeated the familial cycle of generational dysfunction… I could not escape my past. I was at the homestretch of escaping the generational cycle of shame, but it still caught up with me and pulled me under. In theory, I failed.*

This failure is not mine alone. Collective trauma is passed down generationally and reinforced by systems of domination. For Fanon (2004), the trauma of colonialism does not only belong to the oppressed, but also to the mind of the oppressor. In Resmaa Menakem's (2017, 11) work on perpetrator trauma, he also reveals how those who participate in or benefit from systems of domination suffer deep emotional and spiritual harm, often unacknowledged and unresolved.

Vignette #12E: Familial Cycles

> *I loathe the bad choices I made, but later in life I learned why we get stuck in familial cycles of trauma and violence. Since I never learned to love myself, I had no way to measure my own self-worth*.

Fanon and Menakem agree, healing must be collective. They both argue that it requires more than individual therapy or clinical interventions, and it demands radical forms of relational repair, where both harm and complicity are acknowledged (Menakem 2017, 11–20). Healing, therefore, must be collective, involving both acknowledgement of harm and a willingness to participate in radical forms of relational repair (Menakem 2017, 11–20; Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 240). In this way, the colonizer and colonized are caught in a shared, though radically unequal, cycle of psychic distortion. Collective psychological wounding is a characterization of postcolonial oppression which does not heal through individual therapy or medical correction alone.

Fanon argues that trauma must be understood as a social and systemic condition, a part of postcolonial discourse. Schwartz and Sweezy (2019, 241) describe the enduring impact of "legacy burdens" generational injuries caused by racism, misogyny, and economic violence that split communities and corrode trust. As Oliver, Fanon, Menakem, and Schwartz all insist, trauma is not merely personal, it is systemic, generational, and deeply political. The cycle I found myself

in is not just about individual failure; it is a mirror of a wounded society built on imperial myths, binary norms, and unhealed histories.

Vignette #13: The Perfect Storm, Unequal Opportunity

> *The story I am going to tell is about a different kind of storm, the "perfect storm" in which the tempest opens the floodgates to social and political tragedy. Collateral damage is real, and anyone who believes that the intentional harm inflicted by those in power doesn't impact others needs to think again. Militancy always results in other casualties, violence breeds violence. Like the storm on the Virgin River, I was blindsided by its abrupt onslaught.*
>
> *Being elected for this federal program ensured that I would have the opportunity to compete for high dollar government jobs, but it also guaranteed that I would win at least five to seven percent of the bids simply because I was a disadvantaged woman in business. This meant that my company would be receiving multi-million-dollar contracts from this agency.*

This was not just an opportunity; it was the financial breakthrough of a lifetime. I had spent decades building my general contracting business from scratch, navigating both the limitations of motherhood and the demands of a male-dominated industry. Being selected for this federal program meant recognition, legitimacy, and scalability. I was leveling up and investing in a new business model, hiring a publicist, preparing my team for the contracts we had earned and deserved. But the moment I crept my way into "men's work," the floodgates opened.

One of my contractors whom I worked with for over twenty years was *not* a competitor; he was one male who worked in "men's" construction businesses. Like McClintock argues, women's work is not valued; this singular contractor was *not* threatened by me or by my advancement, even as he declared his singular intentions outright: "I'm going to take your bond and take you out of business."

Even after I presented all my legal documents to the appropriate agency and opened an escrow with my business attorney who would pay these contracts with a cash fund set up, I was met with silence. Then came the suspension notice. No due process. No hearing. Just erasure.

Thirty years of work, gone in a letter. This was not one man's damnation, it was the entire system of power who all worked together as a team; the administrative agency, all their male counterparts, their political and economic agenda, and upholding the necessary militance to make sure it remained strictly men's work.

What happened to me can only be fully understood through Spivak's theory of epistemic violence. Spivak (2010b, 26, 28) describes how systems of power "produce" the knowledge that justifies their own authority by controlling who is seen, who is heard, and who is erased. The oppressed are pushed outside dominant systems that are not merely marginalized economically or politically but actually are denied the right to represent themselves within institutional knowledge structures, the ambiguous power of administrative governing bodies.

This is what Spivak names as epistemic violence which is the act of silencing the oppressed through the total manipulation of representation. Said argues that Orientalism was not successful just because of the West's power and their desire to dominate the Orient. They succeeded in part due to the powerlessness and silence of the marginalized people. Said argues that it was this 'silence' that turned academic colonial discourse into actual imperialist institutions by employing public policies and actively engaging in governing, administrating, and militarizing the Orient (Said 1979, 94, 95, 100). Western systems, particularly in economics and law, often operate through binaries: success versus fraud, credibility versus criminality, legitimate versus illegitimate. As a woman marked "disadvantaged," I was legible when it served their purposes and strategies. But once I grew powerful, I became illegible and transformed from a success story into a suspect.

My presence was *recoded* through what Spivak calls *catachresis*: a misapplied metaphor that rewrites meaning in order to preserve control. The high stakes, high income male contractors

mimicked Spivak's (2010b, 38) "native informants" which completely foreclosed on the subaltern and was not only silenced, not alienated, and dispossessed, but sent out to slaughter. My voice, even though their mode of representation, was now aligned with capitalist imperialism (38). For Spivak, when the obliterated course of the subaltern female is erased and racial and sexual difference is on display, the subaltern loses all agency and historical presence (41). Therefore, the subaltern female is unable to speak, act, or represent herself which bolsters the construction of male superiority (41).

Spivak (2010b, 38) asserts that the native informant involved in cultural imperialist projects, "foreclosed" on the heterogeneous subaltern because they now support the intellectuals who vie for the voice of "the other." My legal documents didn't protect me because the dominant narrative had already been written. Women like me, once they move beyond their assigned place, must be brought down, rewritten, or disappeared. Spivak warns that such silencing is not accidental; it is part of a long-standing postcolonial strategy. My experience exemplifies how postcolonial systems of dominance operate within domestic institutions like corporate America, legal and justice systems, and state and federal administrative boards.

These systems are not remnants of past empires; they are active mechanisms of control in contemporary capitalist society, deeply gendered and racialized. As Spivak shows, even privileged subjects can be rendered subaltern when they cross into territories deemed "not theirs" and in my case, large scale federal contracting. Corporate America has a multifaceted identity and alter ego. The powers are the ones that dictate *what* you do and *when* you can do it. Their word is *not* law because the law is intentionally meant to be ambiguous. Laws are written to bend in either direction, it just depends on who you are and who is in charge.

For Spivak (2010b, 33), the form of the word v*ertreten* is applied to the political representation that the hegemonic power "speaks" for. The form of the word *darstellen* is the re-representation of power which influences its staging or the portrayal of representation in an economic context (33). Spivak argues that the model of representation is contradictory in the sense that they relate; but are also discontinuous because the "theoretical process" of transforming consciousness into knowing is shaped by practices that assign labels that categorize identity to economic interests (28–29). Spivak (2010a, 245) suggests this approach fails to produce a represented class that are in community with another. For Spivak, this represents a more masculine form of patriarchy that silences the voice of women and magnifies the depths of power in capitalist exploitative practices (246–47).

Being labeled a "disadvantaged businesswoman" is a double bind. It opens access while simultaneously reinforcing marginalization. The very status that allowed me into the room was later used as a justification for suspicion. I was presumed incapable of managing success on this scale, and therefore any accusation against me could be seen as plausible. I wasn't a criminal. I was made criminalizable. This is a postcolonial logic of dislocation and silencing.

As Spivak argues, the West's global knowledge systems are structured to *include* marginalized voices only under terms that maintain control. Once those voices challenge the powers by growing too strong, independent, or being disruptive like in accepting a huge nomination to be "real" contractors, they are silenced through institutional tools: in my case, suspension letters, gag orders, revoked licenses, and the weaponization of regulatory language (Spivak 2010a, 264–66). This is how epistemic violence becomes embodied for white-identifying women in the United States. It does not occur through war or conquest, but through

forms, letters, legalese, and silence. I was not just removed from my profession. I was written out of my own history.

Vignette #14: Real Life Body Armor

> *Shockingly, I did not realize that being in the game in corporate America required real life body armor. The bookies' rules in New York were simple. They were straight up. Their word was law. Corporate America has a multifaceted identity and alter ego. The powers are the ones that dictate what you do and when you can do it. Their word is not law because the law is intentionally meant to be ambiguous– laws are written to bend in either direction, it just depends on who you are and who is in charge.*

Bhabha (2004, 58) insists that ambivalence challenges and places the focus on the "invented" identities of colonized people. Bhabha's theory of ambivalence mirrors how laws can become powerful tools through discursive colonial power systems which allow contradictions to normalize the history and exploitation of colonialism. (136). Similarly, laws are written to sway, because they are ambiguous by design (50–51).

This vignette shows how mimicry, ambivalence, and control are embedded within U.S. corporate systems and function as modern postcolonial structures. Bhabha's notion of multifaceted strategies and ideas disavow and avow something simultaneously which destabilizes colonial authority. These overtures mask dominance and governance behind policy and regulation in corporate institutions (Bhabha 2004, 95, 101–2, 107).

Said (1979, 203) posits that government policy and administrative law was also designed to dominate the East in which legal documents, codes, and statutes were also used as tools and strategies to gain epistemic control. In my vignettes, they reveal how colonial authority was engrained in public policy and institutional frameworks (93, 95, 102).

The New York "bookies" were involved in organized crime; using trauma, violence, and fear to control and maintain their authority. This parallels the colonial strategy used by the regulatory agency. The difference between the unwritten book maker's laws and the regulatory

agencies' ambiguity concerning law is revealed here. In my cultural context, the bookies did not sway or bend the laws for *certain* individuals. Paying back borrowed money applied to every individual who received a loan. They did not make up the rule's moment by moment, person by person. Rules were law and law was rule.

Corporate America can mirror colonial systems because of the tendencies to propagate ambiguous legal codes through hierarchical power structures; strategies that are not unique to organized crime that I experienced. Body armor, then, takes on a gendered and classed necessity for only select individuals that hold power within the patriarchal hierarchy. As Spivak argues in her work on epistemic violence, women who are deemed disposable are situated in an authoritarian hierarchy. For Spivak (2010b, 41–42), global capitalism forged a sexual division of labor which supported the emergence of new female subalterns. Dominant foreign and domestic social groups also gained interest in "international feminism" which meant women formed alliances with other women to form social and political bonds with bourgeois capitalists (Spivak 2010b, 39, 43; 2010a, 258). Spivak (2010b, 43) states that the most marginalized group was the urban subproletariat who existed outside traditional hegemonic power structures and were denied the privilege to form alliances with any group because they are the most excluded and oppressed class. For Spivak, the foreclosure of the native informant was solidified through capitalist imperialism and the assimilation of colonized subjects, especially subaltern women, who are doubly marginalized by patriarchy (46-47).

Vignette #15: Gag Order, Militant for a Reason

> *My company was ordered not to make any contact with my clients—by mail, phone, email, text, regular mail, certified mail, or in person, or I would go to jail! I actually was under a gag order… Since it would be illegal for any regulatory agency to go out to all the jobs and solicit witnesses by offering them money to file a formal complaint, my competitors took it upon themselves to do it for them! As a result of not being able to respond to over forty of my clients, I received death threats, was cursed, and was accused*

of every shady and horrible act imaginable … I always wondered why the regulatory agencies I was involved with hired top former federal law enforcement agents to head their agencies. The organization of these regulatory agencies, and maybe all regulatory agencies that have high dollar stakes in the industry, is militant, and is militant for a reason.

Although being a disadvantaged white-identifying woman in the United States, I do not make any comparison to the subaltern women that Spivak speaks of in her work. I do however argue that despotism, as theorized by Bhabha, exposes white women in the United States to severe oppression and silencing, even to the point of becoming unseen due to colonial governmentality and surveillance. This renders disadvantaged white women unable to access any civil or human rights agency that can provide fair treatment of a subject that has been "foreclosed" on due to identity, mis-identity, disability, sex, religion, ethnicity, or class. My erasure mirrors Spivak's (2010b, 41) work on the subaltern's loss of agency and their historical presence due to sexual difference, class status, and ethnicity being a Jewish American Catholic white woman.

Being controlled by dominant male groups in organized institutions in the United States that govern part of the workforce in America, rendered me helpless. In my own experience, accessing the very resources I needed to represent me when I was silenced, was nearly impossible. I was penniless and trapped inside of unjust legal systems, without due process. The harsh actions taken against me were unjustified, violating my constitutional rights both in contract and criminal law.

Vignette #16: Kangaroo Court

Let me clarify what a hearing at a regulatory agency entails. According to the Harvard Law Review, regulatory agency hearings are simply administrative 'mock' or 'kangaroo' courts because they are <u>not</u> part of the judicial branch of government that operates under the state and federal jurisdictions to hear cases based on evidentiary facts and case law. Civil courts that operate in part of the judicial branch of government follow strict legal procedures and standards, including adherence to the rules of evidence, procedure, and

> *precedents. They also have juries made up of a body of non-biased individuals who are legally chosen and sworn in who look to matters of fact in order to come up with a verdict based on evidence presented to the court. These regulatory court hearings derive their authority from the branch of government that establishes them, and their focus is on ensuring compliance with the regulations of the agency they represent. The main goal is not to ensure justice, but to reach a specific outcome, usually unfavorable to the accursed. They note that mock courts can exist in various settings, not just in administrative law hearings. They range from informal community meetings to more organized settings, including situations with corrupt or authoritarian types of governments*.

The fact that my civil hearing was conducted by the same agency that suspended my license with no formal hearing or due process reflects the complete lack of judicial impartiality, reminiscent of colonial tribunal models where colonizers were both accuser and jury. Bhabha argues that colonial despotism is more than cultural or civil tyranny, but rather a functional unit of authority. It operates out of bureaucratic, administrative, and ambiguous systems of colonial governance. His work on "Sly Civility" addresses and interrogates how colonial discourse produces colonized subjects through fear, surveillance, and constant repetition. Bhabha (2004, 136–38) asserts the splitting and doubling of the subject attempts to fragment identities and normalize the history of colonialism by etching a "fixed" history of the "other" in civil progression. Bhabha argues that these systems strategically mask their domination through the guise of civility, the reliance on being seen as a legitimate state of order, rationale, and empire. Bhabha is relating the politics of cultural difference that operates through ambivalence of reason, law and governmentality; it civilizes and disciplines while simultaneously showcasing difference (134).

As you may recall, my attorney's strategy was to file a civil suit in a *real* judiciary court so my case could be fairly heard. Bhabha (2004, 135) maintains that colonial signification and signs open a liminal space in which interpretation is intentionally ambiguous which coincides with his theory of mimicry. Mimicry, as a tool, inadvertently forges a third space for the

subjugated, which enables them to negotiate their own identities through the act of "camouflage." This challenges the authenticity of knowledge and meanings embedded in colonial writings and its narrative histories (123, 130). In the same way, there are tensions between rules, law, administrative codes as in kangaroo mock courts. Administrative hearings are like tribunals, not expected to ensure justice, but rather, according to Bhabha's theory, are expected to expose a tension, or a contradiction in colonial discourse (136).

Bhabha (2004, 136) states the contradictions of being the "father *and* the oppressor" or being the "just *and* unjust" illuminate the "incompatibility of empire and nation" which he describes as colonial systems of despotism. Bhabha articulates that despotism within colonial discourse, professes the "identity effects" in which the colonized *seem* to be integrating with the culture, religion, and identity and abiding the rules, laws, and regulations of the colonizers (121, 130). However, due to the complexities of the colonial power at play and the struggle of the colonized people, mimicry becomes both a tool for resistance against cultural dominance. It also functions as a colonial "strategy of reform, regulation and discipline" which appropriates the "Other as it visualizes power." Mimicry substantiates the myth of colonial authority and its cunning adherence to surveillance which destabilizes knowledge and meaning that is not embedded in colonial narratives (122–23, 130).

Mies lacemakers also encountered the guise of civility when they were exploited by capitalists within a global system of structural violence (Mies 2012, 162). My own personal experience in the construction trade aligns with the lace makers of Narsapur's experience regarding the limits in their own governing agency's transparency. The powers that governed me authored their own standards and leveraged their interests, not the interests or contractual and legal obligations of my female-based business (162). The regulatory agency with its own mock

court, non-impartial juries and unbiased parties completely lacked any oversight committee that could intervene for my company and concerns (162–63). My attorney that represented me jumped ship immediately upon the illegal suspension and inevitable revocation of my contracting license. Legally, it is only permitted to cancel a license if there is an imminent threat to the public's health and safety which was not pertinent in my case. According to Mies, the Lace Exporters' Association worked in tandem with the Quality-Marking Officer who was aligned with *multiple* regulatory agencies that held the power. These powers in charge circulated scanty and biased information about the lace trade which gave exporters the advantage while disadvantageous unpaid, home-based lace makers who paid the price (163–64).

Vignette #17: Would They Kill Me?

> *A few weeks later, I received another certified letter this time coming from the district attorney's office. I was charged with three criminal felony counts…. How far would the actors in power go to take me down? Would they kill me?*

Our plan was completely thwarted when I was notified by the district attorney's office that I was being charged for felony theft. The regulatory agency submitted false sworn statements from a former client who claimed I stole thousands of dollars by illegally charging his credit card for a project I did for him. He hoped that he would have the charges that he consented to and signed for reversed by his credit card company. Now, being officially in the criminal justice system and facing serious allegations, no civil rights attorney dared to challenge this public and powerful giant who was well respected, well connected, and militant.

In my own experience of being culturally silenced and in the midst of how these unjust legal processes unfolded, I saw first-hand how power becomes monopolized through normative biopolitical structures. For Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 87–88), the authority determines who is recognized and who is deemed disposable. This powerful agency escalated the matter to a

criminal indictment, effectively shutting down any chance of justice I had through civil means. Normative frames of ontologies, the systems of gender, race, and sex, determine whose life is valuable and whose life is less than human (87, 89–90). My own business attorney who worked with me for years, felt no shame in dispossessing me without a blink of an eye. Furthermore, no other attorney that specialized in this type of warfare in the mock court wanted any part of this. My disappearance as a white woman within bureaucratic institutions legally silenced and politically erased me through the very systems that were supposed to protect me; as Butler and Athanasiou argue, the structures were designed to simultaneously discredit those who are not recognized as the normative, the consequential and precarious sub-human or non-human (89–90). Butler and Athanasiou emphasize that even within liberal democracies, subjects must psychologically internalize hegemonic norms in order to be seen, making survival contingent upon the very norms that disqualify and pathologize them (89–91).

Butler and Athanasiou's (2013, 89) examination of two models of power, sovereignty, and governmentality reserve the right "to kill or let die." In my own case, I experienced being left for dead, and I experienced a metaphorical death of myself and identity. Institutional political violence manifests clearly through gendered labor, sexuality, and class. Butler and Athanasiou theorize that political violence is sometimes recognized. They contend the actual harm it causes can also remain unseen and unheard (89–91). Butler and Athanasiou caution that recognition can also come at a high cost (89–91).

The political violations and confrontations that I experienced went unseen and unheard, as if they did not exist. They also came at an extremely high cost for me and my family. Accordingly, Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 91) argue that, institutionally and politically, recognition of "victimhood" is favored over recognition of those subjects that were dispossessed

rather than having to acknowledge harm done in the name of recognition in administrative and legal systems as seen in governmentality. In my frame, this is the implication of colonial systems of politics and its impact of violence and trauma for disadvantaged white women in peril.

Vignette #18: Time Just Stopped

Time just stopped. I was hit with a cold reality that I was now part of the criminal justice system. This meant I was subject to the procedures, laws, and authorities that govern criminal conduct, from arrest and prosecution to sentencing and potential incarceration. Being entered in the criminal justice system felt like it crossed a threshold where my basic rights were no longer acknowledged or upheld. Anything I said was not used against me- because I literally was not heard. Any words I uttered- were indisputably tuned out. Metaphorically, I entered a new realm of personhood, one that was marked with a crucifix.

Spivak (2010b, 26, 35–37) connects psychological trauma to the silencing of voices, particularly through epistemic violence, the erasure of entire systems of knowledge and self-representation. Like Bhabha, Said, and McClintock, Spivak rejects binary frameworks that categorize identity into simplistic oppositions. She warns that hegemonic Western narratives destroy women's identities, particularly for working class women, perpetuating both material and ideological oppression (27–29).

Spivak asserts that the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project goes far beyond one type of cultural domination. As a disadvantaged white woman, the violence I experienced in militarized and institutionalized systems in my culture maintains imperial power globally (Spivak 2010b, 26–28; McClintock 1995, 16). (McClintock 1995, 16; Moran 1995, 109). These structures I encountered withheld the economic and political agendas of power; furthermore, it erased my entire historical career history and identity. I no longer had thirty years' experience doing construction. I no longer had a successful, respectable career. I no longer was a wonderful mother or person. I no longer had a history that I could freely talk about. I was

silenced, erased, and excluded from dominant everyday conversations, nevertheless historical and postcolonial narratives.

The physiological warfare that I went through led to debilitating inferiority complexes due to internalized oppression as Fanon emphasized throughout his works. Fanon (2008, xiv) argues that the colonized and oppressed were repeatedly represented as inferior, animalistic, and violent. I was represented as an imminent threat to society. I was such a threat that the governing powers felt the need to declare an emergency state, enforcing a gag order, canceling my license, tearing apart all my contracts, and canceling my very existence after operating at the same location with the same license, insurance, and bond for almost thirty years. Overnight, I became a money hungry thief who preyed on innocent people like an animal. It is not a coincidence I became this tyrannical animal just as I was about to embark on the biggest financial project of my life, *or so I thought*…

Chapter 6: A Sacred Resistance Through Ecofeminist and Contemplative Praxis

In chapter five, I examined how I, as a heterosexual white-identifying woman in the United States, experienced postcolonial violence through systems that uphold colonial strategies and violate women at work, in the home, in healthcare, religious institutions, and across epistemological, political, economic, and legal domains.

Postcolonial theory named the systems that produce trauma and violence, while also providing a space for resistance and healing by reclaiming agency and voice through a critical and theoretical grounding of personal experience and suffering.

In this research project, postcolonial and ecofeminist theory do not function as a passive framework or an idealized concept. Instead, it is used, grounded, and embodied in real experience, culminating in data that reveal broader systemic patterns of trauma and violence embedded within culture and institutional life. Throughout this process, the narrative did not compare my experiences with colonized women of color. The research showed how, within shared structures of dominance and power, *difference* shaped each individuals lived realities.

I now examine the data through an ecofeminist lens to further ground my argument that white-identifying women in the contemporary United States are affected by postcolonial structural and systemic violence.

The data do not function as theology or testimony, nor are they used to construct a model based solely on personal beliefs thoughts or individual interpretation. Rather, the methodology enables a deeper exam of theory through one's own lived experience that generates meaning that extends beyond external cultural critique or isolated case studies.

My lived experience is not only about violence, displacement, and upheaval, but how I reclaim my identity and interrupt cycles of postcolonial and patriarchal violence through sacred resistance.

In this section, a praxis emerges; one that *responds* to the violence named throughout this study. This conclusion constructs a model of resistance and healing that invites individuals across diverse cultural contexts, including differences in race, gender, religion, and class, to reclaim their identity, history, and memory, and to narrate trauma through their own words and eyes. At the same time, my method of choice calls institutions, communities, religious organizations, and the academy to recognize how they participate and contribute to postcolonial violence that continues to manifest across contemporary society, shaping systems that harm women, the Earth, and all creation.

I continue to use a layered, non-hierarchical approach that integrates analysis and reflection. This reflexive methodology includes moving between first-, second-, and third-person perspectives throughout the chapter. Within the cultural critique, I draw on my embodied experience to interrogate the social, political, legal, and domestic structures that shape lived reality. My analysis centers on how everyday moments reflect and reproduce broader systems of power, trauma, and postcolonial violence. Fragments of the memory data and extracts of the artifacts will be italicized and in quotations.

Introduction to An Ecofeminist Praxis

Previously, in chapter five, I analyzed Vignette #10 "Do *No Harm*" through postcolonial theory as a moment of violence that marked an ontological crisis in my life. The alienation, dehumanization, domination, and loss I experienced were overwhelming and deeply damaging. As I return to this vignette, this time through an ecofeminist lens, I see the correlation between

my body and nature, but also how my body relates physically to science and technology. Both are rendered disposable under patriarchal systems. Patriarchy violates my body for profit, power, and uses it for a continuum for resources just as patriarchy violates nature for the same. I will re-visit this vignette in this short introduction to ecofeminism.

Revisiting Vignette #10: Do No Harm

> *I put the gown on, and I sat up on the side of the table still crying profusely. The next thing I know, a male doctor walks in holding a syringe in his hand. He looked at me and said, "Honey, stop crying. I am going to cure you today!".... The next thing I know, I awoke. The lights in the room were dimmed. I saw an intravenous line in my arm. My heart sank in horror, and I did not need to ask. I immediately knew the life inside me was gone. I have never felt such loss. I could not speak. I could not yell. The feeling was inexplicable.*

In the literature review, I discussed how Mies and Shiva argue that reproductive violence *is* ecological violence, the manifestation of how patriarchy treats women and nature as interchangeable resources. Women and nature are extractable, controllable, and disposable (Mies and Shiva 1993, 3). The "cure" that was forced upon me was not medical, but systemically scientific. It is what Shiva calls "value-free" logic that justifies reproductive control in the name of science and efficiency (23–25). In my own experience, my womb was treated just like raw materials, resources. My pregnancy, the life of another, was discarded without thought. As Mies collaborates, women's bodies are no longer seen as whole beings but as "arrangements of consecutive objects" to be sold, altered, or thrown away just like unused ova in reproductive science experiments (175–86).

This speaks directly to my argument that patriarchal trauma manifests through ecofeminist violence that connects harm to women and harm to the earth, spiritually, psychologically, and materially. My loss was not just personal. It was primordially spiritual and

ecological. I was not only dispossessed as a mother, but I was also cut off from the regenerative essence that ties women to Earth.

Women's caregiving capacities were not only devalued but actively appropriated by colonial systems in order to construct male authority and to reinforce their dominance (Lerner 1986, 27–28). What I experienced was not an isolated violation of my body; but rather the continuation of imperial strategies to ensure that men maintain authority and control through institutions such as in science and technology (18, 22). White-identifying women in the United States are systemically oppressed by patriarchal patterns that justify economic gain through oppressing nature and women. My body was a resource. My pain was irrelevant. My voice was not admissible.

Ruether (1992, 140–41) expands this work by arguing that women's reproductive power was reduced in order to exploit renewable ecological resources. She argues that contempt for women's ability to give life parallels the cultural disregard for the earth's regenerative cycles. Keller (1993, 31, 41–42) also asserts that patriarchal theology and Western progress narratives sexualized nature in order to dominate it. She argues that women and the Earth are seen as equal, both unpredictable, threatening, and in need of control.

What happened to me in that exam room was not malpractice, it was a conscious or unconscious reenactment of postcolonial power that positions white complicit women as disposable. I experienced patriarchal violence and trauma in a gendered and institutionalized manner that mirrors ideologies of conquest, control, and domination. I was visible and invisible, silenced, and erased.

The trauma to my body was not just a medical incident committed by one doctor and his staff; it was systemic trauma rooted in scientific authority, which possesses no ethical

responsibility. My female body became a source of profit because science uses women's bodies to control humanity and the universe through technology (Mies and Shiva 1993, 84, 186). This denies women of their reproductive identity and reciprocity to nature by subordinating women to capitalist patriarchy coerced by biased sexism. Women's bodies become the epicenter and the source for organic matter; therefore procedures, like abortions, implore women to be cut off from their natural essence (184). Without my consent, a male doctor violated my body, breaking the assumed ethical practices that could justify this type of clinical intervention.

I clearly see how the natural physical environment is being altered and pillaged for research, commodities, and consumerism. Feminist environmental activists were the first to protest against ecological collapse because they see that the relationship between women's bodies and nature are closely related to science and technology (Mies and Shiva 1993, 3). In *Ask the Beast*s: *Darwin and the God of Love,* Johnson (2014, 199–201) argues that the relationship between the mother and child, humanity and nature, and the reciprocal relationship with all creation has been under siege since biblical times. Women have been critical of these patriarchal dichotomies that subordinate women to men, and nature to men. This concept of progress in our world today recognizes the need for production and the warfare of consumerism. But if we are to be stewards of the Earth and representatives of God, our community with all creation should lead to a spiritual vitality that connects us to the source of power, God. But women have been persecuted for rejecting patriarchy and sexism in their own spiritual tradition long before world religions ever existed.

Goddess centered religions defined the connections to female spirituality and the Earth, the life centered sacred energy that flowed through women and freely to others throughout the world (Mies and Shiva 1993, 16–17). But in a patriarchal society, the spirituality that connects

women to God through their reproductive identity and reciprocity to nature was seen as heretic. So, women, in redefining their worth and restoring their dignity as equals in the eyes of God, were murdered by men that are hostile to the notion that women have been equally created by God and differentially formed in the image of God. I personally saw the hostility on that physician's face when he smiled at me and uttered those evil words, "Honey, I am going to cure you today."

Domination pits human against human, projecting its dominance not only in culture, politics, and religion, but also in technology and science. An androcentric view of God has historically positioned male dominance as being both the cultural normative and both divinely assigned since Jesus was a male.

Christian dogma continually enables systems of violence in the Christian faith particularly against women, the Earth, and all marginalized peoples. Ecofeminist discourse is a necessary response to counter patriarchal and colonial frameworks because they parallel the subjugation of women to the exploitation of nature. Feminist Catholic theologians, like Ruether, and Johnson, are concerned with religious traditions, particularly Christianity and Judaism that biologically and historically hold women responsible for original sin which has been used to justify the subordination and violence to women and their bodies (Ruether 1992, 140–41).

In my experience, I was not only physically violated but spiritually dismissed. The way my physical body and my spirit driven consciousness as a life bearer was violated, shows how science and technology fail to recognize the sacredness and personhood of a human embryo (Mies and Shiva 1993, 184). Mies and Shiva converge with Ruether's argument that the devaluation of women's reproductive capacities is tied to cultural and theological narratives that marginalize both women and nature. Ruether (1992, 140) insists that women's life-bearing

power is seen as a threat and ends up being something to be controlled, feared, or blamed. I still find it extremely difficult to believe that a male doctor would have such ill intentions. The clinic *was* a Planned Parenthood organization who are supposed to give women options and wise counsel.

In "Talk About the Weather: The Greening of Eschatology," Keller converges with ecofeminist arguments that women truly are seen as being a threat. She opines that females are radically and consistently compared to nature and weather rendering them completely unpredictable and harsh. For Keller (1993, 35), an ecological imbalance parallels gender imbalance, where women's bodies and nature are simultaneously undervalued and endangered. My passive body, being a site of trauma, was plundered and destroyed in an exam room that one grim afternoon. What occurred was not a clinical intervention, it was a medical battery. Patriarchy capitalism is something that needs to be controlled, surveilled, and feared, not women and their bodies. When trusted professionals become agents of punishment, their actions become more unpredictable and more threatening than nature itself, harsh, dehumanizing, and justified by a system that prioritizes profit over intrinsic human worth.

Theology as Praxis

The last narrative in chapter five ends with the haunting line: "Metaphorically, I entered a new realm of personhood, one that was marked with a crucifix." This image foreshadows a theological shift that begins in this chapter: a movement from epistemic healing (chapter 5) into a sacred, embodied, and communal restoration through an ecofeminist contemplative praxis. The theology enters *here* as praxis, not as autobiography. My body is no longer an object of domination, and it becomes the dwelling place of Divine presence.

This section will engage the method of practical theology through an ecofeminist lens. My narrative data shows how my lived experiences naturally guided me toward the liberating and omnipresent God, who affirms all creation starting with my own wounded body and spirit. In this theological praxis, I will critically reflect on my body *today* as an active site of trauma and as a vessel that connects my real world lived experiences and practices with God, others, and all creation. I will continue to provide insights by using the method of reflectivity drawing from my narratives of survival and resistance. In continuity, I will employ contemplative reflections from scripture and my own mystical encounters with God so that I can *re-interpret* meaning that is guided by a sacred ecofeminist praxis. This structure will serve three purposes. First, it will reveal how an ecofeminist critique can theoretically show how women's physical bodies and nature are disposable under capitalist patriarchal systems. Second, it will show how an ecofeminist form of resistance can restore the body through Christic embodiment, which in itself is an ecofeminist practice. *Patriarchy,* then, is disposable; because now, it restores the dignity and reciprocity of the female body along with nature, and all God's creation. Third, this chapter will show the broader differences of healing patriarchal trauma through an epistemic healing, as seen in chapter five, versus healing guided by a sacred ecofeminist praxis.

When I experienced how time just stopped for me and left me marked with a crucifix, it marked the time of my *fuller* conversion experience and transformation. In continuity with this dissertation, I will continue to use the symbiotic methodology of autoethnography. I will generate meaning from my narrative data using a layered approach sticking to a non-hierarchical writing structure for analysis and reflection. I will continue to use the method of reflectivity that may include talking about myself in first, second or third person interchangeably. It also may include using proper nouns to identify myself and others in this chapter. My reflexive insights

from my narrative data and my contemplative reflections may not follow a chronological order. I will continue to locate the data in the subheadings of the autoethnography using vignettes that will be labeled according to the narrative data. Fragments of the memory data and extracts of the artifacts will be italicized and in quotations.

Revisiting Vignette #18: Time Just Stopped

> *Time just stopped. I was hit with a cold reality that I was now part of the criminal justice system. This meant I was subject to the procedures, laws, and authorities that govern criminal conduct, from arrest and prosecution to sentencing and potential incarceration. Being entered in the criminal justice system felt like it crossed a threshold where my basic rights were no longer acknowledged or upheld. Anything I said was not used against me—because I literally was not heard. Any words I uttered were indisputably tuned out. Metaphorically, I entered a new realm of personhood, one that was marked with a crucifix*.

In this transitional vignette, I re-visit Spivak's theory of epistemic violence through an ecofeminist contemplative praxis. Spivak (2010b, 26, 35–37) asserts that epistemic violence goes beyond one type of domination. Spivak allows me to deeply reflect on how violence is not only physical, but extremely linguistic, institutional, and deeply psychological.

As I contemplate on the arrest and imperial sentencing of Jesus in the Gospel of John, my physical body gets pulled into the crowd. I relate to Jesus's suffering body and my own suffering body. Jesus is being held under arrest and sentenced by Pontius Pilate. This time, I am standing among the very crowd of *powerless* and *oppressed* people that cry and shout out to Pontius Pilate, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (John 19:5–6). My body now becomes a site of resistance, sacred knowledge, and embodied healing through contemplative and ecofeminist re-interpretation.

I look up to the Pilate's headquarters and see Jesus with a crown of thorns woven on to his head, blood dripping down his face onto the majestic purple robe the soldiers entombed on

Jesus's body. Jesus no longer holds any authority. Jesus was also no longer seen even in the eyes of his own Jewish and deeply oppressed community. Roman soldiers beat and mock Jesus publicly. Jesus was not just publicly alienated but also denied and betrayed by his own close and beloved family, his disciples and friends. Without a question of doubt, Jesus *was* guilty. He was a blasphemer and a fraud.

In this moment, everything Jesus did in his life was just erased. Jesus's body was desecrated in public view. I watched Jesus get physically nailed to the cross. I saw Jesus take in his last breath; concurrently, the curtain of the temple tore into two. I felt the entire earth shake, and I heard the rocks splitting apart (Matthew 27:50–51).

During this contemplative reflective experience, I re-lived my own very public trial. As I re-lived my own experience, the angry crowd of my peers and all the authoritarians already condemned me and found me guilty as well. I started to feel anxious, traumatized all over again. My chest was constricted. I was shaking and gasping for air. I was branded a liar, cheat, and a fraud.

My entire snow-white past being clean, dedicated, and full of integrity instantly didn't matter. Words and evidence did not matter. The form of silencing I experienced echoes the imperial sentencing of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The authoritarian Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" (John 19:10). Jesus answered him; however, Pilate was not able to accept Jesus's truth. Pilate abdicated his power directly to Jesus and to the crowd, saying, "I find no case against him" (John 19:6), while the people insisted, "Crucify him! We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:5–7).

In this reflection and contemplation, I recognize the imperial systemic structures in Spivak's work as I stood among the crowd at Jesus's and my own sentencing. The cultural, social, and judicial power was transposed to a crowd that was indoctrinated by internalized systems of imperialism, religious hegemony, and patriarchal violence much like we see today in the United States. Thus, the crowd becomes both victim and perpetrator, mirroring how oppressed peoples may unknowingly participate in the very systems that erase them. The crowd repeats the dominant episteme. Jesus is thus not only condemned by Rome but also disavowed by his own religious community. He is rendered unrespectable, un-hearable, unrepresentable.

In this way, Jesus becomes a subaltern figure who died and was denied the right to speak or be heard on his own terms. His crucifixion was not only a political execution but an epistemic silencing. He posed a threat to imperial history, to cultural orthodoxy, to religious authority and was erased.

And yet, from this act of erasure emerged a theology of presence and resistance. Through an ecofeminist praxis, I no longer see myself as the object of the state, the law, or the crowd. I begin to see my body as a dwelling place of the sacred temple of God. Jesus's body, like mine, was once marked for death but became the very site of Divine revelation and resurrection. I begin to reclaim my body not as an oppressed white-identifying woman, but as a vessel of memory, resistance, and transformation. The theology in this section is not confessional, not doctrinal, not individual, but very communal and practical. It is grounded in experience and lived reflection. It is a praxis of healing that arises from the spirit after silencing that connects with God and all creation, the restoration of the spirit that reverberates the rhythms of the entire cosmos, not the disposable empire.

A Second Revisiting of Vignette #10: Do No Harm

In the next vignette, I re-examine Vignette #10, "Do No Harm," by moving from postcolonial theory, particularly how women's bodies become the only available means for political and social expression, to an ecofeminist contemplative praxis that offers sacred healing. Spivak's postcolonial work revealed how women often use their own bodies in hopes to be heard, like in the case of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri who tragically did not survive her own pain that was overwritten by institutional systems of power.

I will contemplate Mary Magdalene's healing in Luke (Luke 8:2) through a Christocentric ecofeminist lens. In Mary Magdalene's dominant culture, her body was seen as unclean and disordered. She was an outcast who was deemed as an irrelevant witness (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56), and her body was completely subject to danger and violation under imperial Roman rule.

Contemplative prayer is an ecofeminist praxis in itself because it resists domination by returning to the body relationally, sacredly, and being one with God. In contrast, it resists viewing women's bodies as objects to be managed, extracted, or controlled.

A Third Revisiting of Vignette #10: Do No Harm

> *I was trashing God, begging God to ease my pain or to get rid of my pain completely. Then all of a sudden, I found myself immersed in a transcendental experience which took on a truly dark diabolical form. It made all the pain and grief I was suffering from feel completely insignificant. In this dark transcendence, the devil offered me a deal. It wasn't just any deal; it was the exact deal that I had been specifically praying to God about and agonizing over. I was offered the opportunity to never experience any emotional pain or sorrow ever again. The invitation was accompanied by a "sample" of what having no pain or suffering would feel like. I became completely empty and void of emotion. I felt no suffering. I literally felt nothing. There was no doubt in my mind where this enticing lure came from, it was positively evil. I immediately began calling, shouting aloud to God, praying aloud, reciting prayers, and begging for God to return me back to my 'wretched' state. Instantly, I returned to who I was. I knew for the first time that God was actually with me, and that God was actually in me. To this day, I lose sleep at night wondering*

how many other people were potentially presented with this same proposition; and I quiver to think how many people may have accepted this tricky evil bargain.

As I reflect on my body as a vessel that connects this lived transcendent experience with God, others, and all creation, I envision Mary Magdalene being healed by Jesus. Luke's Gospel states that Magdalene was "cured of evil spirits and other infirmities," namely seven demons (Luke 8:2, NRSV). As I contemplate Magdalene's embodiment of such profound affliction, I resonate with her physical, mental, and spiritual suffering. Although scripture does not explicitly detail how these demons impacted her body or how she was physically healed, I understand her healing as deeply embodied, relational, and communal. Scripture also tells us Magdalene was not the only person healed that day; her story is both individual and shared. Magdalene's healing returned her to God. The sacred exchange between her and Jesus restored the reciprocity through her devotion to God and others.

Personally, I can deeply resonate with how Magdalene was brought to spiritual, emotional, and physical restoration without dominance or control. Her body implicitly connects to nature, and her restoration mirrors the renewal of creation itself. Jesus poured out love into her life, restoring not only her body and spirit, but her social belonging; she was healed without erasure or silencing.

What I really deeply resonate with Magdalene is the fact that she remains a grieving witness and her healing did *not* exempt her from future suffering. My vignette explicitly states that I begged God to return me to my "wretched" state after a sobering spiritual encounter with evil so I could return to Love and be with God. Similarly, Magdalene returned to Love after her healing but still suffered. Her healing was a transformation, *not an exoneration from future pain*. Transformation does not mean the end of affliction; rather, it is the beginning of living in union with a God who suffers, loves, and bears the cross for our everlasting life.

The crucifix becomes a symbol of this holy paradox, the site of agony and promise of communion. When I write about my body as a site of the crucifix, I contemplate Magdalene's experience at both the cross and the tomb. Her bodily presence and visible grief are evident (Matthew 27:55–61; John 20:11). She did not flee suffering; she stayed. Her faithful presence is a radical form of discipleship. Scripture tells us how the story ends. At the tomb, Magdalene saw the risen Christ and wanted to hold onto him, but she had a new spirituality to embody, being one in suffering with God and all creation until the time of completion, God's plan for salvation fulfilled. Her spirituality became deeply communal and limitless. She embodied suffering and hope, pain and promise.

Magdalene was healed. She felt pain, she remembered Love and was transformed into a new creation. Her story lives within mine. Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV). Like Magdalene, I reclaimed my history, voice, and agency; but my suffering was held, not erased. I am grateful for this experience, which made me a bearer of resurrection knowledge, not a bearer of power.

Vignette #19 Church Became Difficult

> *There are twelve specific words from the Catholic liturgy that haunted me day after day. Those words are, "Look not on our sins, but on the faith of the Church." I felt these words only justified sin and the church was sending a message that it is alright to sin as long as people remained faithful to the church. Add these liturgical words to the history of the world and the church and see if this is the reason that people, Christian people, turn a blind eye to murder, violence, sexual assault, slavery, torture, genocides, organized crime, and warfare just for starters. I wanted the Church to speak out against these atrocities, to teach the true gospel message, to uphold the Church handed down to Peter which is not about justifying violence in the name of God!*

In the epilogue of *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson (1992, 273) asks the foundational theological question that frames her book and delivers a counter narrative to the Church: "What

is the right way to speak about God in light of women's reality?" Throughout the book, Johnson offers a radical ecofeminist critique and counter narrative for the Catholic Church for the erasure of the Holy Spirit within patriarchal structures. From an ecofeminist perspective, the *silencing* of the Spirit in the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist reflects that the Catholic Church continues to be aligned with systems of domination, namely colonialism and patriarchy. The Church has taken a silent stance on Johnson's counter narrative; they continue to overlook God's word concerning mutuality, relationality, and seeing God's presence in all creation.

Johnson's (1992, 134–36) use of feminine metaphors affirms women, their experiences, bodies, and their divine image in God as sources of restoration and healing. Drawing on the feminine figure of Sophia within Wisdom traditions, she shows that women were never excluded from biblical and doctrinal history. From the beginning, women were included and integral to creation, "the human as *imago Dei*" (31). This theological re-framing resists male dominated readings of scripture and recovers inclusive language that certainly challenges patriarchy and an Imperial Jesus.

Johnson's (1992, 31) understanding of the Trinity calls for mutuality with one another and a reciprocal relationship with all creation. Under imperial and patriarchal systems, the Holy Spirit is pushed to the margins or just erased altogether from the doctrine of the Trinity. This contradicts the holy word of God which affirms, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, ESV). However, the Church has a long history of using gender and dogma to exclude women from ordained ministry, priesthood.

Yet Johnson does much more than this to counter the dominant narrative. In her reflections on salvation and suffering, she rejects individualized notions of redemption. Healing,

restoration, and salvation are not just private acts of piety, but rather communal processes as we have learned from ecofeminist and contemplative praxis, including my own reflection on the life of Mary Magdalene. Ecofeminism tells us that the body is not separated from the earth; the body is sacred, the place where God dwells (Johnson 1992, 138–40). Johnson also reclaims the divine presence in moments of suffering through the Spirit-Sophia, Wisdom incarnate as healer, sustainer, and advocate; Spirit-Sophia lives in both body and earth who groan for liberation (Romans 8:22). While patriarchal science objectified my body, Spirit-Sophia restores its meaning. Johnson (1992, 134–36) insists that creation is an ongoing process, not just a one-time act, in which the Holy Spirit is continually active in working to heal and renew all life and creation. My experience and suffering were not lost in the void. When a male or female is baptized into Christ, they are transformed without any uncertainty into the body of the Triune God.

A Fourth Revisiting of Vignette #10: Do No Harm

> *The memory of love dies when the pain and suffering dies. I learned that there is a symbiotic relationship between love and pain, love and sorrow, love and grief. No one can know love without knowing sorrow because no one has the means to access one without the other; no one can approach and enter because the 'ingress' is the actual path to the light of God, the love of God.*

In revisiting vignette #10B, I engage in an ecofeminist contemplation of the crucifixion, grounded in my own embodied experience. Through the lens of John's gospel, I reinterpret the meaning of suffering and trauma not as individual, but as deeply communal.

I desperately needed to understand the lingering desolation and despair that stayed with me, long after that day on the medical exam table. I began. I entered the crucifixion story, imagining what Jesus must have felt as he carried his heavy cross. Immediately, sensations returned to my body. My heart raced, I became restless, anxious, and afraid. I was filled with

doubt. I realized my thoughts were not coming from the spirit of Christ. I re-directed my focus on the character of Jesus, then I re-read the scripture. In that contemplative moment, I accompanied Jesus up the hill. I gently touched Jesus's hand and forearm. There was so much noise all around me, it caused confusion. I wanted to separate myself from the noise. I wandered into an abyss of dry lands. I remember waking up alone on the exam table in a dim and deadly silent room. I felt completely empty, filled with grief, and a heavy weight pressing down on me. I was sensing the unknown.

Even now, recalling this moment is painful. So, I went back to walking with Jesus. We were nearing the site of the crucifixion. Jesus was quiet, weak, sweating, and bleeding. Jesus was visibly in physical and psychological pain. Nearing the site, Jesus saw his grief-stricken mother and beloved disciple. With strength, assurance, and strength, Jesus, by the power of God, asserted, "'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26–27, NIV).

At that moment, I felt God speaking directly to me. I gained a new understanding of how I must respond to my own cross. Jesus's crucifixion was not private. It was public and communal. Jesus's suffering did not just belong to him. He was not isolated. Jesus literally connected with the wounded. Jesus's body was in relationship with his mother who bore him, with his beloved disciple, the other women at the cross, with the two men crucified beside him, with the crowds, and even with the Romans who crucified him.

Jesus's body was returned to the earth, and to the heavens, mother and son, earth and body, women and creation. Jesus's suffering was deeply and profoundly embodied. I became the woman at the cross, the witness, the mother, the one called to hold the pain of others with presence, not erasure. This encounter with God came out of my own *woundfullness,* which *is* a

term I coined to describe a state of being fully aware of both my physical and spiritual existence marked by trauma and pain. Recollection of my embodied experience allowed me to meet God on a deeper, contemplative level during this time. I am fully confident that God was with me in that exam room. The cross is not only a symbol of redemptive suffering. It is also a call to sacred resistance where the memory of love lives on because we do not erase the pain. My body, like the earth, remembers. And remembering is a form of resurrection**.**

A Fifth Revisiting of Vignette #10: Do No Harm

> *The memory of love dies when the pain and suffering die. I learned that there is a symbiotic relationship between love and pain, love and sorrow, love and grief. No one can know love without knowing sorrow because no one has the means to access one without the other; no one can approach and enter because the 'ingress' is the actual path to the light of God, the love of God.*
>
> *Accordingly, suffering is a simultaneous operation that dually functions on both planes, the physical and the spiritual level. The enigma of suffering suggests a reversal of order that is recognized as an inner work that dynamically coexists with transcendent aspects of our total being that can either be hidden, protected, or revealed. Therefore, to be present in our physical bodies without the notion of pain or suffering, is the actual abyss, the void, the true darkness. Without these dynamic inner works, we cannot access God, who is love. The cry of a newborn signifies the soul's journey from the spiritual world to the physical world in which the body immediately encounters negative stimuli, pain and suffering. Being present in the physical body requires this access to love and to God. In the same way, the sighs of our last breath signify the soul's journey back to the spiritual world in which we re-encounter the divine light, the transcendent Divine Creator!*

These vignettes reflect an embodied theology of suffering and renewal, being born, unborn, and re-born. After the nonconsensual abortion, the trauma I experienced left me spiritually disassociated. But through contemplative practice, I began to understand that suffering functions on two levels, physically and spiritually. Pain, when held with love, opens the door to Divine presence. This insight aligns deeply with Thomas Merton's contemplative theological praxis.

Thomas Merton (1915–1968), Catholic priest, Trappist monk, and mystic, taught that the path to spiritual transformation involves detachment from systems of domination and from our constructed false selves. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton (1961, 1–2) calls us to "unknow" what we have learned in the physical world which has been imposed on us through patriarchal systems. In order to uncover our true selves, where God lives, we must disavow all external validations. Being "devoured" by worldly attachments keeps us from being able to fully connect to God from our innermost being, our true selves (83). This spiritual practice is not about *erasure* of our woundfullness, but rather being radically present with our suffering, the earth's suffering, and the rest of creation's suffering.

Merton's contemplative praxis, being cloistered, did not mean departing from the world or socioeconomic order. It meant returning to the earth, the desert, and the natural world to re-interpret his own true identity (Merton 1961, 80). Merton's own ecofeminist consciousness reflects within his teachings and his anthropological solidarity. His inner solitude takes him to the depths of humanity, becoming one with all creation and discovering what it actually means to "love thy neighbor" (81).

Merton's contemplative practices consistently align with ecofeminist principles. For Merton, true liberation is being free of entanglement with oppressive systems (Merton 1961, 166). Like Mies and Shiva, Merton (1992, 383) also challenges the misuse of science and power, urging humanity to choose peace and reverence for life. This theological consciousness is ecofeminist: it opposes domination and restores reciprocity between human and all creation. Merton suggests that we look toward deconstructing the imperialist world in which we live and recognize the choices we have when it comes to science and our call as Christians to serve peace and humanism (383). For Merton, God connects with humanity through the suffering and

sacrifice of the cross so that we may participate with God to live the eternal life we were created for (Merton 1961, 163). Loving and being in solidarity with all creation is attained through the sacrificed and transformed body of Christ which through our own sacrifice brings us to salvation (166).

On the medical exam table that day, I did not escape medical science. I also could not escape from my body, nor could I heal from the violence I experienced. It was not until I encountered Jesus on the way to his crucifixion that I started to heal. My detachment to the physical world did not begin in silent prayer. It began in a medical clinic, in real time, embodied and entombed in desolation. Yet Jesus walked with me when I did the unimaginable, which was walking in that clinic in the first place. I was physically present, but completely spiritually disembodied from my own will, totally absent to God. I did not consent to the abortion that occurred, nor did I intend to go through with it. And yet, in the months that followed, I was forced to confront the truth; not for the act itself, but for the ways I had left God out of the conversation entirely. I had not prayed. I had not surrendered my fear. I had not trusted God with my life, my future, or my motherhood.

This horrible experience still brings me to tears even today, but it reveals how much God does love us, even when we are not right with God. Merton also had some scandalous moments in his life and he was unsure if he was capable of completely giving himself up for God, but he took the walk of faith regardless. I tried to convince myself that I was afraid of being alone and afraid to fail as a mother, but that was not the whole truth. What I feared even more was losing my own life by surrendering myself entirely to God. Merton (1948, 460) entered the monastery believing he had to relinquish writing, the deepest passion of his life. After this experience, I learned that God calls us to love him first and foremost over everything, but he truly gives us the

deepest desires of our heart when we put God first. As Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, NRSV).

Merton (1948, 460) ended up the writer he always dreamed of being. He also realized that God does not remove the desires from our hearts but uses them for his perfect will because he loves us and wants us to be in relationship with him (Rice 1970, 55). As sad and heart-breaking this experience still is for me, I would not have been able to receive the divine and insightful revelation from God; nor would I have been able to love God, know God, and to trust God like I do today.

This divine insight does not just apply to my suffering from a nonconsensual abortion. It applies to all the trauma and violence in my life that I suffered from. Detachment became a way for me, a wonderful part of me that I would never want to give up. Contemplative praxis and reciprocating with nature and all creation is the gateway to our soul nature. It is also the way, the means, and the ends to meet, know, and dwell in and with God. Detachment then, is necessary in order to live in the spirit of Christ. In Catholicism, the Paschal Mystery is the dying to self and the rising of the new self, the absolute road to salvation. The Paschal Mystery brings new life through the culmination and completion of Jesus's life, passion, death, resurrection and accession whose sacrifice redeems us and breaks the chains of the slavery of sin.

Revisiting the Paschal Mystery

> *I saw my own reflection retracting off the blistering pavement. I did not recognize who I was. The person I had built myself up to be all my life, just vanished out of thin air. It was on this day that I realized I was standing amongst some of the most oppressed and forgotten people in the world. With brutal clarity, I realized how the system and unjust social structures fail people, how our religious communities fail people. Today I still remember all the nameless faces who stood in line with me that hot summer day waiting until their number was called. I can still hear their stories and their cries for help.*

After I re-explored the meaning of the "paschal mystery" through an ecofeminist lens, I have a new interpretation of the event. I now write:

> As I stood in line for food stamps that blazing hot summer day in Texas, I saw my own reflection retracting off the blistering pavement. I did not recognize who I was. The person I had built myself up to be all my life, just vanished out of thin air. It was on this day that I realized I *was* one of the most oppressed and forgotten people in the world, enjoined with others. With brutal clarity, I realized how the system was unjust and how postcolonial structures continue to fail people; how the church, still rooted in postcolonial and imperial systems, fail people.
>
> I certainly *did* just vanish from thin air; this is because on this day, I *accepted* God's calling. My eyes opened for the first time. Today I still remember all of my brothers and sisters who stood in line with me on that hot summer day waiting for our numbers to be called. I can still see our nameless faces and I can hear each of our stories and our cries for help.

Today, I realize how the Lord blessed me, despite my suffering. I did *not* have to walk away sad like the young rich man in Mark's gospel. Scripture states that Jesus looked at the young man and loved him. He "said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:21–22, ESV).

Revisiting "No Identity"

I did not recognize who I was.

Merton (1961, 2, 3) states that detachment is always beyond us and beyond our own knowledge, which allows us to be awakened by God himself. When I was standing in line to get public assistance, I looked down and I did not recognize my own shadow reflecting on the ground. I did not know *who* I was that day, but I *did* know *whose* I was from that day going forward. Contemplative life is a response to God's call to us, an echo. Merton writes, "It is a deep resonance in the inmost center of our spirit in which our very life loses its separate voice and re-sounds the majesty and the mercy of the Hidden and Living One" (3).

Vignette #20: Birds of a Feather Do Not Always Flock Together

I was on my last leg health wise. I had a thirty-five percent lung function and was hospitalized for weeks at a time each month. Things were bleak.

When I worked as a nursing assistant at fifteen years old, I took care of a lot of sick people, dying people. I knew human bodies pretty well after three years of working in hospitals and nursing homes. Humans have historically been obsessed with bodies; religion is concerned with both physical and spiritual bodies. Our bodies change, then renew. We live in our bodies and then out of our bodies. All of our bodies are vessels that connect us to different realms of spiritual life. Creation is revitalized moment by moment by every movement of God who occupies the higher dimensions of space and time. We travel through transcendental channels in which we are connected to nature, all creation, and to God.

Birds are also a paradox. They symbolize purity, death, new life, transitions, and Divine presence. In an ecofeminist and contemplative praxis, spatial time matters because it can refer to a metaphysical dimension of existence, time, and being or it can be an *actual* physical real-time account of existence, time, and being.

In the section of my autoethnography titled, "*On Monks and Birds of a Feather,"* the birds in my apartment physically existed in *real* time. However, I cannot discount the metaphorical meaning of all the birds of different feathers coming together in my apartment. Transcendental encounters with God occur metaphysically in which we are not aware of the space in which we travel or the time in which it takes.

Physical encounters with lots of birds in real time is a rare occurrence. Nature then, can be a conduit of spiritual and Divine presence. When I saw the birds flock together and come into my apartment to visit me for almost a month, I did feel it was God's way of preparing me for my

final journey. Now, I know that the birds flocking was an interlude to my transcendental experiences. Healing, then, does not necessarily require medical intervention or absolution by a priest, church, or clerical group; it could come through a radical encounter with God and nature. As I have used my body as a site for trauma, this moment highlights the interconnectedness of my embodied dis-ease, the birds, and the Creator. This demonstrates how nature and feminist spirituality coexist. This mirrors Johnson's theology of Spirit-Sophia and Ruether's insistence that all creation shares in divine love and healing. Salvation is a holistic, unified body of all creation; we serve life in all its truth and its circles. In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis (2015, sec. 2) states that "we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." For Johnson, the Holy Spirit-Sophia is the movement of God who transcends all time and space that is present and at work everywhere.

Vignette #21: Mystical Healing Through Contemplative Praxis

> *I did not look up at Jesus's face. He moved his finger gently across my chest, using the flame like a sacred medical tool as he was performing what felt like a divine surgery on my heart. Back and forth, he traced over me with glowing precision. My gaze never left his radiant index finger*.
>
> *At this moment, I was still in the complete presence of God, and all His glory was still above and below me, surrounding me in pure light… I was not eager to get up or leave Jesus's presence, I just wanted to engage my spirit, my excitement, my dismay to him; but I could not move about, and I was not able to express myself to him with words or any actions.*

As I reflect on this vignette, I recognize that my body is a vessel that connects me to all creation, nature, and God. I have experienced a new contemplative awareness that illuminates how the Spirit of God encompasses all moments, all experiences, all events, and permeates all living creation with God's transformative power (Johnson 1992, 124, 134). Johnson argues that the act of creation is not one single event, but rather an ongoing work of divine compassion in

which the Holy Spirit renews across time; therefore, my healing is also not just a single event, an isolated encounter of personal healing and liberation from Jesus (134–36). Salvation is in the history of creation; therefore, salvation is not a personal union with God either, but rather a communal event connected directly to healing, rebirth, and renewal in reciprocity with all creation. For Johnson, the Spirit-Sophia is an agent of prophecy and liberation which she relates to the life, death, resurrection of Jesus *and* the mark that salvation has been enacted (138–40). The self-communication of grace that comes through Jesus Christ in the incarnation is the solution for the human problem: sickness, trauma, violence, and death (Rahner 1978, 114). Jesus is the mediator of salvation and the culmination of eschatological history; so, it is clear that the church represents an explicit proclamation that Christ is the path to salvation for all people and that God, through Christ, willfully gave himself up immutably for all creation (322). Love for one another does not mean an individual and personal encounter with God because the universality of God calls for something communal (323). Healing and transformation can happen on an interpersonal level; however, conversion takes place in a much broader way outside one individual or group of people. God is present and active in the world and radically transforms in community with the risen Christ. Jesus entered into humanity to demonstrate God's true mission to be in solidarity with all people and cultures creation. The incarnate Christ entered humanity with a specific salvific purpose for all people and continues to exist as the glorified Christ. This means that we were meant to have a relationship with Jesus, the Godman, whose love draws us into the infinite incomprehensible mystery of being (308).

The command to love others is the fulfillment of what it means to be human. Since we cannot attain salvation on our own, we are called to love our neighbors; this means when we love the stranger or the outcast, we are directly loving Jesus himself (Rahner 1978, 309). This is a call

to all Christians to convert their hearts and their minds (Johnson 1992, 195). True transformation and conversion enable Christians to see the entirety of the world as one creation which is an integral part of redemption (Johnson 2018, 186, 201). Following Johnson, I argue that a communal vision of salvation is not a pyramid of human privilege and right, but rather a reciprocal relationship between humanity and the rest of creation (204). Faith convicts us to see how the cross intersects with the suffering of humanity and all creation because Jesus entered into humanity to join in our suffering. Christ accompanied us and invited all people into his family of God through adoption (222).

In my contemplative praxis, I envisioned being healed by God. I closed my eyes and started to pray. I was on my last leg. I met Jesus in our garden. I asked Jesus to heal my heart. I began visualizing Jesus doing surgery on my heart. Then, I knew I had entered the higher dimensions of existence, space and time. I was not present in my apartment. I did not communicate through words, just through my thoughts and my love. Jesus also did not communicate through words. We were no longer in the garden, but in a place of warm light. I felt the weight and love of God's Divine and transcendent presence. I watched Jesus's flame lit finger gently move across my chest. God's flame-lit finger worked like a sacred medical tool performing what looked and felt like a divine surgery on my heart. Back and forth, he traced over my heart with glowing precision. My gaze never left his radiant index finger.

Then, my eyes were fixed on Jesus as he removed a number of shiny silver nails from my heart and placed them one by one on the side of the warmly lit table. In my mind, Jesus communicated to me that these nails represented new wounds to my heart. Then I saw Jesus go back into my heart removing more nails, this time the nails were all rusted. Jesus communicated to me without words that these rusted nails represented old wounds that pierced my heart long

ago. Jesus's flame-lit finger went back in my heart. Jesus removed a number of wooden planks. Jesus also placed the planks on the side of the table by the nails. It was communicated to me that these planks were the weight of the cross I was currently carrying. I had layers of matter in my heart weighing and holding me down. Jesus took all of this out of my body, making my body a site of healing and love. Then once again, Jesus continued to move his fire-lit finger around my heart. He pulled out many old splintered weathered planks and placed those on top of the other planks. Jesus communicated that these planks not only weighed me down but how they continue to cause me new daily injuries and pain. Jesus carried on this divine healing of my heart, then pulling out mops of tangled vines, some that were wrapped tightly around my heart. These vines were newly grown; they were green in color. He unraveled and removed other bundles of vines from my heart and placed them on top of the weathered and splintered planks. Again, God communicated to me that these weeds constricted my heart. I regarded the vines possibly as negative emotions that I held in my heart throughout my life, maybe even feelings of self-hate that was holding me down. Next, I saw Jesus pull out dried out dead vines. Jesus communicated to me that these particular dead and dry vines that grew like weeds and took over my heart because I never tended to them at all. It was communicated to me that since I never tended to them, they became so brittle they turned into sharp thorns which scarred my heart but also marked and scarred the earth.

Therefore, my body became the site of injury to others and all creation. Finally, Jesus piled up all the weeds, dry brush, thorns and placed those on top of the planks. Jesus gathered all the nails and placed them on the planks as well as our eyes met. I do not know how long or what place I traveled to, what metaphysical dimension of time and existence I was in. I recognized I was back on my couch in my apartment. The first thing I did after this transcendent experience

was get up and walk. I was fully able. As you may recall from the ethnographic narrative, I walked to the grocery store and stayed there for hours walking up and down aisles with nothing in my shopping cart in awe of the healing and experience. I was processing it all in a supermarket until my family called me and summoned me home.

After this experience, I had to do some deep recollection and reflection in the wake of this event. I concluded that our healing is in communion with others, the spikes, rust, rotting wood, vines, weeds and thorns scatter, entering other bodies, creation, and nature which goes against God's true mission to be in solidarity with all people and creation (Rahner 1978, 308).

Witnessing Jesus's finger move across my chest, healing becomes a sacrament of connection between flesh and Spirit, earth and heaven, suffering and love. It is contemplative praxis embodied, Spirit-led, and wholly ecological. The doctrine of grace has been extended to *all* creation in order to fully understand how the communal body of the church attains salvation through the glorified Christ (Rahner 1978, 114). It is hard for me to fully articulate this experience even today. There is a knowing within me that tells me we are made for God and all of His existence, creation, and movements to live in a body not marked for death, for the full restoration of the spirit, body, and soul.

On Rivers

I began my autobiography with the first section *On Rivers*. I mention that this river tubing trip was not just a rough ride. It was a journey that fundamentally changed my perspectives on life, vulnerabilities and the resilience of the human spirit. This trip certainly was a precursor to embodying future struggles and trauma in my life. The river that day was a series of calm stretches abruptly disrupted by churning turmoil, mirroring large segments of my life; but, as I grew spiritually, healing in communion with God, I saw the many triumphs in my life that

overshadow any stark reality of struggle. Therefore, I find it appropriate to end this chapter with an ecofeminist contemplative praxis of *On Rivers*.

Our family's experience on the Virgin River reverberates how nature can indeed be unpredictable, harsh, and threatening. However, science is not concerned with technological advances that contribute to climate change that cause fast and furious flash flooding and environmental ruin. All people must experience an "ecological conversion" of the heart (Francis 2015, sec. 217).

The following vignette is a strong example of the violence to the earth spiritual, theological, and ecofeminist dynamics that converge within one harrowing lived experience. It shows how faith and reason intersect, moving belief and faith beyond theory. This moment happened in real time, there was no roadmap to follow, and it defied any logical response. My experience encountering the Divine required no intermediary, no formal education, training, prerequisite, or address. Thus, in the midst of darkness, the desert, the storm, in the eye, in desolation, in anger, in spite, in brokenness, confusion, imperfection, woundedness, fearfulness, or near death, I was fully aware that all individuals can encounter God. But, sometimes, it takes a catastrophic event to see and feel God's presence.

Vignette #22: No Do-Overs

> *On Rivers is not just an average river tubing story that went wrong. It is a story about an intense fight for survival. It is also a story about being face to face with a punishing reality that some of us, or all of us could die. The realization of this kind of knowing is indescribably paralytic. There are no do-overs. The story also was not just about what went on in the river this particular day. The story was a precursor to a future life event that strongly resonates more starkly against the backdrop of later struggles in my life. My life, much like the river that day, has been a series of calm stretches abruptly disrupted by churning turmoil.*

This particular narrative is very difficult to analyze and recollect because of the nature of this very traumatic experience. Even today, none of us want to relive this. However, it is truly a

story of resistance, healing, and survival through God, others, and nature. It is very difficult to recall seeing my three-year-old son, five-year-old nephew, thirteen-year-old daughter, and sister almost drown. I never completely understood the meaning of this lived experience until this analysis.

This contemplative praxis will be a three-step process. Using an ecofeminist lens for each reflective interlude, first I will describe how I felt at the time of the experience. Second, I will provide a reflection on how I felt after this experience. Last, I will reflect on how I interpret the meaning of this experience in the present day by focusing on the cross and how it intersects with humanity and all creation.

I know this is an extreme visceral account of survival. However, it is also a visceral encounter where I come face to face with nature, the velocity and strength of the storm. As I reflect on this embodied experience, I see myself torrentially in the hands of the wind. On deeper contemplation, I see myself torrentially in the hands of God. I am filled with fear. First the force of the wind renders me powerless, helpless, and completely reliant on nature. In this moment, I have nothing but hope that God and the Wind will have mercy on me and my family. I see and feel the power of the Wind and God, who is one of the same. I am at the mercy of God, the Wind. I can clearly see now that God and Nature are one. I feel an overwhelming force driving me, tossing me, pushing me down, pulling me up, throwing me side to side. God does not go a certain direction, neither does the Wind. I do not know where I am going. I am unable to grip the Wind, to take hold of God, or to command or request anything from Them. I am frightened because the wind is powerful; so is the flowing water, the strong current.

The presence of Wind and Water takes me to a different level of consciousness. I become part of Nature, the mud, the moving rocks, the swaying and uprooted trees, and the rising murky

water. Nature flows with the Wind. Nature does not resist the Wind. Nature is fearless and accompanies the Wind whatever direction or speed it goes. I notice that both the body and nature are resilient. The river is a sacramental source. I give in to Nature, but this does not mean I give in to the conscious reality of the current condition of my embodied state. I do not feel well, comforted, or safe. There are moments of calm, the Wind ceases and we drift around. The turbulent water gently flows. I see a deer with large antlers staring right at me with its large brown eyes that are fixed on me. Suddenly, the deer runs up the steep mountain crag, looks back at me. The Wind starts back up, and we are being deeply jolted around again. The living waters suck us up, we are not at peace, but we do not give up our spirit. Suddenly, it stops. All of us get rescued by the river outfitter's guides. After this near-death experience, I painfully reflected on the fact that all or some of us could have died. Here is a journal excerpt of my reflection a few days after this encounter:

> *I was one with nature, Lord. You chose me by name. You have counted every hair on my head, on my children's head, my nephew's head, my sister's head. We are your beloved. I cry out to you, God, You are the Wind, Water, Fire, Bird, and the Wisdom Spirit Sophia. I think of the passage in Job, but I feel no relief. I think of Peter and the apostles in the boat during the storm where Peter walked on water. The disciples were on a boat. The wind and the water was fierce and they were frightened. They saw you, you wanted them to trust you. Simon Peter took the first step, then flailed. I felt this way on the river, that I was failing you. I had one foot out of the proverbial boat and one foot in the boat. I think this is why I feel no joy when I read Job. I have a long way to go, Dear God. However, I know this encounter was not a mistake, but rather a precursor to a future event for all of us*.

As I re-interpret this vignette today, I know this was an extreme visceral account of survival where I came face to face with nature, and the velocity and strength of the storm. As I gain further insights of this embodied experience, I still see myself torrentially in the hands of the wind and torrentially in the hands of God. I am less fearful. Remembering the force of the wind overwhelms me because I was truly completely reliant on nature; I had nothing but the

ability to have hope in God at the time, but now especially. I know You and the Wind had complete mercy on all of us. I am humbled by this very experience, but also how much you love me and my family. Thank you, Lord. Praise you, God. Jesus, you are the power, the Wind, Water, Fire, Spirit, and Creator. You are the highest power and Almighty God. I am forever at your mercy. I can clearly see now that you prepared all of us for this overwhelming force that tossed us all around, up and down, knocking us from side to side. Wind does not go in a certain direction, thus is life. I still do not know where I am going, but I am able to grip the Wind, and hold onto you God, tightly. Thank you, God. Praise you, Lord. I never want to command anything from you again. I want to become one with you. I am not frightened by the wind because it is so powerful, or the fiercely flowing water. The Divine Wind is the breath of life and Spirit, and the flowing waters wash and purify me. My flowing tears are the salt of the earth. The presence of your Breath and Your Living Water take me to a different level of consciousness. I become part of Nature, the sand, the rock foundation, the swaying trees, and the rising clear water. Nature flows with the Wind. Nature does not resist the Wind. Nature is fearless and accompanies the Wind whatever direction or speed it goes. Both the body and nature are resilient. The river is a sacramental source. I give in to Nature which means I give up my body for you, for I am one with God and all Creation through your Holy Spirit which sanctified my soul by the blood of the cross. I feel well, comforted, and safe. I treasure the calm and the moments where the Wind swoops me up. I sit near the streams that gently flow. I see your warm gaze upon me, eyes that are fixed on me. The living waters have saved us; we are all at peace and give you our spirit. We are rescued by your love.

Transcendence and Resilience of the Human Spirit

This text shows that we can experience a deep personal encounter with God, through

nature, water, and wind. This symbolizes God's presence in my life and my connection to God, nature, and all creation. I write, "The Divine Wind is the breath of life and Spirit," which recognizes the sacred vitality that pulses through all creation (Rogers 2016, 21; Rogers 2011, introduction). This reflection marks God's love, renewal and restoration of life. God sustains the world and helps us to reconcile our past, present, and future. This intimate moment of transcendence illustrates how body and spirit become active sites of healing, union, and divine revelation.

In *She Who Is*, Johnson (1992, 133–35) draws on the Christian tradition's understanding of the Holy Spirit as Spirit-Sophia, the wisdom and power of God in. For her, the Spirit is not distant and passive, but rather present and active. Johnson argues that Spirit-Sophia is the renewing, energizing life-force that dwells within creation and within our bodies (131–35). The Spirit "recreates" and "renews" not just individuals, but the social and ecological structures of the world (135). This notion directly parallels the imagery in my reflection where I become "part of Nature, the sand, the rock foundation, the swaying trees." In this moment, the Spirit is not mediated through dogma, doctrine, or any clerical authority, but is encountered directly through the natural world and through my own tears, breath, and surrender.

Johnson also emphasizes that Spirit-Sophia is intimately connected with fertility, joy, pain, and the sacredness of life-giving power, which echoes my experience of becoming one with the elements of the earth as an act of trust and union rather than resistance or fear. I write "Nature does not resist the Wind," which reflects Johnson's pneumatology and her accompaniment doctrine on the trinity (Johnson 2018, xiii). Becoming one with nature and all God's creation does not just accompany Christian spirituality but sustains and renews life even in suffering. Johnson reminds us that Romans 8:22 tells us that "all creation is groaning, waiting for

its redemption" (Johnson 1992, 135). This is not passive but active work of renewal, just as my own body, in its woundedness, yearns toward integration with Spirit and Earth.

This experience also reflects the spirituality of Gloria Anzaldúa's critiques in *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Anzaldúa (2012, 39, 49, 64) explains how women, particularly women of color, have internalized shame and also feared spiritual power that religious institutions sanction when they allow androcentric views of God and specifically use male pronouns in doctrines, liturgies, and sacraments. My spiritual encounter reclaims a feminine divine presence due to an ecofeminist consciousness and how I talk and think about God, as Johnson expresses throughout her book *She Who Is*. Jesus-Sophia heals rather than shames. Jesus-Sophia invites and includes instead of punishing and excluding (Johnson 1992, 151–53). Johnson's work offers a vision of God, not as a remote patriarchal judge, but as a living, breathing, renewing force, an advocate, as described in John 15:26–27—"the Spirit of truth," who testifies within and through us (137).

My words, "I never want to command anything from you. I want to become one with you" mirror Johnson's call to theology. Spirit-Sophia does not coerce or dominate; she flows, she renews, she invites justice through peace (Johnson 1992, 136). The spiritual knowing that emerges from this vignette is neither hierarchical nor institutional. The theology is embodied, ecological, and illustrates the heart of ecofeminist practical theology that integrates the whole person, the earth, and the living Spirit who holds all things together in love, breath, and transformation.

The power of the contemplative encounter is grounded in mystery. It can move us through spiritual realms that uncover sacred truths about who we are in God; whereas words alone cannot touch the depth of our souls (Rogers 2011, chap. 3). Reenacting the story in the

liminal space of our minds far exceeds only hearing about how Jesus's touch heals an outcast of society; but the actuality of being present with God when he heals us with his touch, is the encounter that draws us into God's love story (chap. 3). Faith convicts us to see how the cross intersects with the suffering of humanity and all creation because Jesus entered into humanity to join in our suffering. Christ accompanied us and invited all people into his family of God through adoption (Johnson 2018, 222).

The Model

In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* Padmini Mongia (1996, 8–9) argues that the term *postcolonial* still faces critique in academic and social circles in our ever-changing world. She is concerned with the institutionalization of postcolonial studies in the Western academy which could detach theory from actual postcolonial struggle. This connects with Arif Dirlik's (1996, 316) argument in "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." Dirlik concludes that any individual that studies or even resonates with postcoloniality, should recognize their own ambiguity and complicity in postcoloniality. He additionally asserts that everyone should take a step back and recognize how their own class, race, and academic position collude with global capitalism (316). Critiquing our role in global capitalism, Dirlik suggests generating practices of resistance against this system, which he names capitalism, as the "product" (316).

In the conclusion that follows, I end with an offering, a mode for resistance, developed in recognition of the role I play as an individual who studies and resonates with postcoloniality. I also acknowledge my position as an ambiguous and complicit white-identifying woman in the United States who, through my own class and privileged location, participates in global

capitalism. I know my body was an active site of trauma, but my research has shown that it is also an active site of resistance and a vessel that carries my real lived experiences.

Conclusion: A Practical Theology Model

"Naming Postcolonial Violence and Responding Through Transformative Ecofeminist Contemplative Praxis"

Overview

This conclusion synthesizes the findings of this study by presenting a practical theological model that responds to postcolonial violence named throughout this dissertation. Through this analytic and reflexive process and methodology, a praxis emerged, a practical model grounded in healing, transformation, and sacred resistance.

This model has been shaped by my lived experience as a white-identifying woman in the United States and by my analysis of how postcolonial systems operate within institutional, cultural, and spiritual domains.

My six-step transformative model is not derived from personal reflection by itself but directly results from my research in postcolonial and ecofeminist theory. I name and expose the systems of power that produce trauma and violence, including institutional, cultural, and epistemic forms of domination, by using postcolonial theory. Through this process, naming becomes a form of resistance that reclaims voice, identity, and agency.

Ecofeminist theory further interprets the body as both a site of trauma and knowledge. This reveals how the violation of women's bodies is interconnected with the exploitation of the Earth and nature through patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems. By integrating these frameworks, this dissertation constructs an ecofeminist contemplative praxis that moves beyond critique to offer a model of healing, transformation, and resistance.

Furthermore, this model is offered in solidarity with others, particularly survivors of trauma, as a way to reclaim their own identity, history, memory, and be able to narrate trauma

through their own words and eyes. This model is the central theoretical and practical contribution of this dissertation.

This transformative model actively engages individuals in their own narratives by inviting them to reimagine their experiences using ecofeminist and postcolonial theory. I lead them through the very process I embodied during this research. Individuals are not passive storytellers, rather they become active participants in their own transformation, reclaiming agency and moving toward liberation. Centering around relational, embodied, and interconnected ways of knowing, allows individuals to reinterpret their stories in connection with self, others, God, and the Earth. The Six R's represent an original framework that translates postcolonial and ecofeminist theory into a lived, transformative praxis.

Theoretical and Theological Foundations

This ecofeminist contemplative model is grounded in postcolonial theory, ecofeminist thought, and embodied spirituality. Postcolonial theory provides the critical framework to identify how systems of power produce violence, silencing, and dispossession across cultural and institutional contexts. Ecofeminist theory reveals the interconnected exploitation of women and the Earth, emphasizing relational, embodied, and interconnected ways of knowing. Together, these frameworks form the foundation for a contemplative praxis that responds to postcolonial violence through healing, resistance, and transformation.

The Six Steps to Healing and Transformation (The 6 R's)

1. *R*e-flection
2. *R*e-name and frame
3. *R*e-interpret
4. *R*e-imagine

5. *R*e-visit

6. Re-union

When all the foundations are holistically fused together, the model becomes a site of sacred disruption, a place where healing can happen.

Cultivating a deep connection with God, others, and all creation enables us to reclaim our agency and identity, expand our capacity for healing, and become agents of restoration for both people and the Earth.

The 6-Step Praxis

The first step invites **re-flection**, which allows the mind to remember pain in order to begin the healing and transformative process (Menakem 2017, 11–20). Within postcolonial theory, remembering is a critical act of resistance against epistemic erasure and silencing produced by colonial systems of power. The second step helps us to **re-name trauma, framing** it with clarity. Reflecting on our pain does not erase trauma, it allows us to embrace trauma (Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 240–41). The third step encourages a different perspective that prompts a **re-interpretation of the trauma** initiated through contemplative prayer. The fourth step requires **re-imagining** the trauma which opens up a space for divine inspiration and new understanding. The fifth step urges us to **re-visit** the site of trauma, now held in a renewed context which brings fresh insights grounded in a contemplative **re-union (6th step)** with God, others, and all creation.

The Six Movements of the Model

There are six core movements to the model. The first movement is the **autoethnographic re-flection,** which maps the narrative and the nature of the trauma. This process starts with recollection, which returns to the event and the embodied impacts (Menakem 2017, 11–21;

Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 240–41). By reflecting on the narrative of lived experience, this movement can chart memories, emotions, locations, and inherited ideologies (240). The text then becomes honest and full of clarity which allows a space for healing and resistance. **A word of caution:** this movement can evoke deep emotional responses that may need to be addressed first and is outlined in the *Guidelines for Engagement* section below.

The second movement is to **re-name and frame the trauma** which must *resist* erasure. Remember the story of Magdalene who was healed by Jesus, but her suffering was still held (Matthew 27:55–61; John 20:11). Since we are made in the *imago Dei*, our stories are theological. Naming the trauma then becomes an act of sacred resistance. Knowing where and how pain intersects with systemic, institutional, or religious structures of oppression help us to be mindful of the root cause of the trauma. With this awareness, we are better prepared not only to resist violence, but to deconstruct the systems that enable it, whether in the workplace, a religious or academic institution, in law and justice, in nature, or in our own daily lives and activities. By understanding and naming the trauma, this process restores agency and identity through the sacred spirit. Additionally, the body remembers, so trauma can be stored in different parts of the body, through the senses, through our reactions, through physical manifestations such as pain and dis-ease (Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 51). This is the point where trauma is **reframed**. Rather than internalizing violence, participants reinterpret their experiences through ecofeminist critique which links the domination of women's bodies to the domination of the Earth. This practice reclaims spiritual agency through sacred reciprocity, embodiment, and divine presence. The body has not been broken under sacred resistance; it renders patriarchy as disposable. The female body is restored to God, all creation, and to mother earth.

The third movement is a **contemplative theological re-interpretation of trauma** that integrates an ecofeminist praxis with Christian spirituality and or interreligious contemplative practices. This movement is anchored in reflective theological work and sacred embodiment. This is where trauma is not erased, but repositioned. Rather than internalizing violence, individuals can reinterpret their experiences through ecofeminist critique and link the domination of women's bodies to the domination of the Earth. This movement allows those practicing to reclaim spiritual agency through sacred reciprocity, embodiment, and divine presence.

The fourth movement is a **reflexive contemplative re-imagining of scripture** that invites stillness, imagination, and a sacred type of listening. Participants engage in contemplative exercises such as a slow reading of scripture as they visualize the scene and watch the sacred story unfold. This movement requires a deep illuminated awareness of everything taking place in the sacred text:

- Characters in the scene should be noted and named.
- Track the emotions and actions of the characters. Visualize the scene. Look for signs of danger, trauma, healing, joy, persecution, possession, dominance, and restoration.
- Attend to nature itself and all creation. Note the weather, landscape, plants, animals, the wind, the waters, dried bones, blooming flowers, sounds, etc.
- Participants can also engage in embodied prayer, whether it would be a walking prayer exercise or a breathing meditation. Participants should note how their own body reacts to the praxis of placing oneself in another individual's narrative story.
- Participants should fully empty and quiet the mind. Transformation does not occur through logic, but through surrender.

The fifth movement is a lived response to a **communal and embodied restoration**, rather than a private or individual healing. This movement requires **re-visiting** an embodied experience using a different context to **re-interpret** the same experience. For example, I used Spivak's postcolonial theory to name the trauma and then revisited that same experience through an ecofeminist contemplative lens.

The sixth movement **holds the trauma, but at the same time centers the body as a cite of knowledge and truth, re-union** with God. This is where the healing and Spirit are restored by the process that moves outward, mapping the journey, using the memory, resisting, re-rooting the self and externalizing the trauma. This movement invites others to journey together in small groups and women's circles. It also can be adapted for other contexts including retreats, spiritual formation, education, and direction. However, this movement can be practiced in solitude as well. When a participant opens their narrative up and includes nature, the wind, the water, the earth, the dust, etc, -we partake in a communal healing with God and all sacred creation and experience an embodied communal restoration.

Who Is This Process For?

This model was created to be both flexible and interactive. While my research specifically focuses on my lived experience, I chose using an autoethnographic methodology in order to explore deeper meanings across diverse cultural, racial and geographical perspectives. My goal has been to examine how postcolonial violence and trauma are experienced within and across different contexts. As Heewon Chang emphasizes, a self-narrative is never just personal; it is cultural. It connects the individual with the systemic, the communal, and the global (Chang 2008, 16–18). In this way, this model speaks to people of all social locations who have encountered systemic erasure, disembodiment, or trauma. This model therefore holds potential

not only for healing individuals from trauma, but also for challenging internalized colonial structures and cultivating cross-cultural spiritual solidarity. This is my hope and a significant reason why I embarked on this journey myself.

This process can be

- Undertaken individually by someone engaging in personal spiritual healing.
- Facilitated one on one by a spiritual director, pastoral caregiver, or trauma informed counselor or mentor.
- Used in small groups like in women's circles, theological reflection groups, or ecofeminist spiritual retreats.
- Integrated into educational settings, ministerial programs, seminaries, justice ministries, or spiritual formation in group settings with or without a facilitator.
- Used by churches and religious communities in an attempt to regain trust in light of the violent religious history of Christianity.

Many denominations of Christianity still uphold postcolonial structures that cause violence to women, the earth, and all creation. This model can also be used to bring back the Universal Church; the Church that Jesus handed over to Peter which has veered far away from the gospel message of non-violence and inclusion. Jesus called us to welcome the stranger, not exclude and judge, and to love one another as ourselves while caring for the Earth and all creation without domination.

Guidelines for Engagement on How This Process Should Be Used

I discussed who this process is for in the above sections stating it was created for all trauma survivors. I also stated this model was created to be both flexible and interactive allowing this work to be done one on one, or with a facilitator or group.

However, I have not mentioned how important it is for this process to be done in a *safe* and *quiet* environment which has access to multiple systems of support if needed.

This ecofeminist contemplative model is intentionally designed to be flexible, adaptable, *and* deeply relational. While it is rooted in theological reflection, it also engages with very deep emotional and psychological factors and experiences, especially for those who carry trauma, loss, or systemic harm that they have not yet worked out.

I suggest using a *tiered* approach to begin using this model for healing and transformation depending on the individual's (1) specific needs, (2) trauma that they carry, and (3) need for medical and or psychological evaluation, considerations, and necessary interventions.
For example, my own account of a transcendental contemplative healing of my heart from God included sacred healing, but it also included physical medical treatment from licensed physicians and surgeons and support from surgical procedures, medications, cardiovascular rehabilitation, lifestyle and diet change, and therapeutic medically implanted assist devices.

Therefore, the process I envision begins with *three tiers of facilitation*, depending on the participant's overall needs and the context as stated above.

Tier 1: Personal Practice with Guidance

Tier 2: One-on-One Facilitation

Tier 3: Small Group, Educational or Retreat Setting

All the participants, regardless of what tier they start in, should keep a journal or use other forms of narrative arts to externalize reflections. All participants should go *slowly* to avoid triggering deeply disturbing emotions, thoughts, or feelings. All participants should have **s**upport systems already in place: such as a journal, a trusted spiritual friend, or access to a therapist, spiritual director, and or medical facilities.

A Tier-by-Tier Breakdown

Tier 1: Personal Practice with Guidance

Individuals may engage in the model *personally*, especially those who already have a contemplative prayer life or spiritual practice. A printed or digital guidebook or workbook could help guide and structure the process safely, including reflection questions, prayers, and suggested pacing. Here are specific guidelines to engaging in contemplative prayer:

Reflection, Reconciliation, Detachment

- Reflect on God's unconditional love and non-changing character.
- Acknowledge your personal sin. Reflect on the larger state of worldly sin.
- Clear your mind by concentrating on your breathing or by imagining a peaceful place where you will encounter God.
- Detach from "doing" something. Move to a state of just being in the moment, transitioning to stillness.
- End the session meditating on Jesus's call to follow. Imagine Jesus walking with you throughout your average day. Mediate what it would be like to have God with you each step of the way.
- End in a prayer of gratitude. Incorporate thankfulness in your daily life.

Two Core Prayer Methods

1. Meditation

- Use your intellect and imagination.
- Reflect on Scripture, inspiring stories, or other sacred literature.
- Focus on the meaning of words, images, what life in the spirit means.

2. Contemplative Prayer

- Use your own thoughts and emotions.
- Enter into a Gospel scene or sacred moment.
- Pray being present in the moment and scene.

Tier 2: One-on-One Facilitation

First and foremost, all participants should seek a facilitator that they feel safe with that respects your requests, boundaries, and privacy. The facilitator should be experienced in contemplative prayer, meditation, and trauma informed spiritual direction. This model is designed for trained spiritual directors, trauma-informed clergy, therapists, or pastoral caregivers to facilitate with individuals in a one-on-one setting.

A participant should find a facilitator who has experience in contemplative prayer and meditation. A participant should qualify a potential facilitator by 1. Verifying the facilitator's experience with trauma-informed spiritual work, 2. Knowing the facilitator is ready and able to handle difficult emotions or memories that may come out from these spiritual sessions, 3. Knowing the facilitator is open minded to different faith backgrounds, sexualities, or cultural experiences, 4. Asking the facilitator how they integrate embodied contemplative practices in their work. 5.Examining the facilitators cultural and intersectional awareness - how do they view power, gender, race, and sex? A participant should also feel heard by the facilitator who safeguards your own personal story without imposing any rigid requirements on the reflection and contemplative praxis.

Tier 3: Small Groups, Educational or Retreat Settings

The third tier is the most concrete formal way to completely utilize the process I envision. While my model is rooted in spiritual healing and embodied contemplative praxis, revisiting memories of trauma, systemic violence, and deep emotional pain must safeguard all participants

and provide support. In light of these dangers, tier three will connect with other interdisciplinary support systems.

Dr. Frank Rogers Jr. is a distinguished author and theologian who serves as the Muriel Bernice Roberts Professor of Spiritual Formation and Narrative Pedagogy. Rogers is also the co-director of the Center for Engaged Compassion at the Claremont School of Theology. Rogers uses narrative pedagogies as spiritual formation to enable liberation, compassion, and social based communal healing through creative arts.

Rogers also teaches Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFST), an evidence-based model of psychotherapy created by Dr. Richard Schwartz, which helps individuals be mindful of all their moving parts that contribute to trauma; past, present and generational. Schwartz's work on collective healing and trauma helps individuals relate to pain with compassion, curiosity, and spiritual grounding (Schwartz and Sweezy 2019, 50–53). Schwartz's concept of the self-led person defines and describes individuals who have access to the self, therefore have the capacity to hear, understand, and be present with their parts acknowledging and appreciating the importance of their roles in the internal family system and with other people (282). My work was greatly inspired by Rogers' work in narrative pedagogies, spiritual discernment, and self-led compassion studies. In addition, Schwartz's (2001, 18) proven psychotherapeutical model teaches how we can recognize every part that makes up our psyche.

In this third tier, my model can be fully utilized by participants through educational settings such as retreat, series of workshops, part of a curriculum that can be used in schools, or for training spiritual directors, trauma-informed clergy, therapists, or pastoral caregivers. Dr. Rogers' and Dr. Schwartz's work on collective healing and trauma guides my own foundation in carrying out my work in group and educational settings.

In his book series, *Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers Through Stories*, Rogers' use of narrative pedagogies helps groups of people to overcome trauma through the transformative power of God. He believes that stories emerging from sacred encounters with others, widen the meaning of our lives through the lens of the divine, the enterprise of Christian living taking root in one's life (Rogers 2011, chap. 2). He also articulates that stories do not have to be bound *solely* to sacred doctrine which can help my model reach various groups of people, different religions or cultures. Rogers argues that *all* stories can be used to form personal and communal identities, reiterating that narrative pedagogies provide a bridge to connect people from different cultures as they discuss their own journey, struggles, and their hopes for the future (chap. 2).

Cautions

In many contemplative traditions, the mindful state is the place where we find peace and joy (Schwartz 2021, 27). However, it is important to note that memories could be buried deep within a person or can be completely hidden, and these memories can resurface which could be deeply traumatizing for any group or individual already suffering from inner traumas. Racialized, generational, or collective trauma occurs when people are abandoned, excluded, rejected, or abused mentally, sexually, or physically.

Our bodies respond physically to the recollection of trauma because our emotions are stored in our minds; consequently, trauma is not just a critical emotional response, but rather the human body's protective response to something it perceives as dangerous (Menakem 2017, 7). Integrating these models into the curriculum helps to counter these experiences. They also ensure that my theological ecofeminist model does not become another process which only serves white

western Christian normativity but rather adheres to the model that affirms a diverse process for multiplicity and sacred difference.

Example of Threading the Process Step-by-Step

Vignette #10: Do No Harm

- **Reflexive Narrative Mapping**: I wrote the story of a medical violation that became a moment of identity rupture.
- **Sacred Naming of Trauma**: In Chapter 5, I interpreted this through Spivak's lens of epistemic violence—how women's bodies are overwritten by institutional power.
- **Ecofeminist Theological Re-Interpretation**: In Chapter 6, I reframed my experience through Mies and Shiva, recognizing how reproductive control and ecological exploitation are intertwined. My womb became a metaphor for Earth.
- **Contemplative Re-Imaging**: I contemplated the healing of Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2. Through silence and imagination, I allowed myself to be held by Jesus in a space beyond language.
- **Restorative Praxis by Revisiting**: Through this work, I created this model. What was once silenced has become a sacred contribution—a process I offer to others seeking healing.

An Ecological and Practical Theological Foundation Outline

- **Exploring Postcolonial Theory** names the systems of violence, dehumanization, and structural oppression embedded in culture, domestic domains, religion, economy, the workplace, politics, and in law and justice.

- **Using Ecofeminist Theory** and an **Interpretive Ecofeminist Theological Lens** to reframe women's bodies, the earth, and sacred texts as connected sites of Divine meaning, healing, and restoration.
- **Autoethnography and Reflexive Praxis** calls for a lived theology rooted in experience, action, and reflection, notably from the margins.
- **A Transcendent and Contemplative Praxis** provides inner spiritual tools for discernment, presence, and embodied resistance.

Step-by-Step Praxis Guide

Step 1: Begin with Narrative—Telling Your Lived Experience

- Tell your story. Start with a memory, a trauma, a moment of loss, joy, confusion, or revelation.
- Use any medium: short reflection, journal entry, poem, prayer, autobiography, role-play, audio voice notes, dramatic re-enactment (Rogers, *Finding God in Graffiti*, introduction).
- Follow a non-hierarchical narrative style by using first, second, or third-person narration interchangeably.
- Use the method of reflectivity drawing from your personal narratives of survival and resistance.
- Let the story come from the body, from where you hurt or where you feel sacred knowing.

Step 2: Identify the Systems by Naming Postcolonial and Patriarchal Violence

- Use theoretical tools (examples: Bhabha's ambivalence, Spivak's subalternity, Fanon's psychopathology, McClintock's gendered labor, Said's framing as static) to name the structural forces in your narrative.

- Use theological tools (examples: the Bible, prayers, poems, sacred reflections, religious liturgy) to respond to the violent structural forces in your narrative.
- Ask: What systems of violence (law, medicine, religion, family, capitalism, and so on) shaped this moment?
- Reflect and respond to what is visible and provides clarity without blame or contempt for yourself or others.
- Read the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist to identify

Step 3: Reframe with Sacred Imagination by applying an Ecofeminist Contemplative Practice

- Revisit the same story through a different lens using scripture, Spirit-Sophia, prayers, or sacred imagery.
- Read the Catholic Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist to identify the silencing of the Holy Spirit by exclusively relying on masculine language.
- Read Christian Doctrine and identify theological silencing of the Holy Spirit reinforced by patriarchal domination within the readings and the practice.
- Ask these questions:

    -Where is the Spirit of God in this memory?

    -Where does my body groan with the earth?

    -How can I see myself connected to nature, God, the earth and all creation?

    -How can the natural elements of the earth be seen as part of your own spiritual embodiment? How can violence be seen through nature?

    -Can this story be transformed, not erased?

    -How can I accompany others, even perpetrators in my contemplative journey? -

-Why is my story not individual? Who or what else is connected to your own narrative and how does that connect you to all creation, others, and God?

-Where are women's voices in doctrine and dogma in the Catholic and Protestant churches. Why have women been silenced?

- Use ecofeminist thinkers like Elizabeth Johnson, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Vandana Shiva, in order to explore how the body, earth, and divine are all connected.

Step 4: Engage in Daily Silence

- Incorporate the **Six R's** as a spiritual discipline of noticing, reflecting, and re-encountering the sacred: Re-flect, Re-name and frame, Re-interpret, Re-imagine, Re-visit, Re-unite with God.
    1. **Recall** a moment from the day that moved you emotionally.
    2. **Review** where you felt connected/disconnected from God, creation, or yourself.
    3. **Respond** with gratitude or lament.
    4. **Recommit** to presence and healing.
- Practice deep breathing, silence, or walking meditations in nature.
- Use breath prayer, body-centered awareness, or scriptural contemplation (e.g., John 19:26–27; Romans 8:22; Luke 8:43–48).

Step 5: Invite Others—Share and Co-Create Sacred Community

- Share your narrative when ready in trusted, intentional spaces.
- Encourage group reflection, shared readings, and collective storytelling.
- Offer role-play, audio reflections, dramatizations, and journaling groups.
- Consider small cohorts using books like *She Who Is*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, *Staying Alive*, or *Finding God in Graffiti*.

Suggested Syllabus Readings

Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*

Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism*

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Frank Rogers Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*

bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice" in *Teaching to Transgress*

Peter Gelderloos *How Nonviolence Protects the State*

Frank Rogers Jr., *Cradled in the Arms of Compassion*

Contemplative Reflection Prompts

- Where does your body carry grief? How does the earth mirror it?
- In what ways does your spiritual imagination resist systems of violence?
- What does resurrection look like for you, and how does your own trauma relate to Jesus and the cross?
- How can your truth and recollection of a particular memory become a sacred act of communal resistance?

Conclusion

The power of the contemplative encounter is grounded in mystery. It can move us through spiritual realms that uncover sacred truths about who we are in God; whereas words alone cannot touch the depth of our souls (Rogers 2011, chap. 3). Reenacting the story in the liminal space of our minds far exceeds only hearing about how Jesus's touch heals an outcast of society; but the actuality of being present with God when he heals us with his touch, is the encounter that draws us into God's love story (chap. 3).

For psychological and spiritual healing frameworks, visit the following:

- Internal Family Systems Website: https://ifs-institute.com
- Trauma Research Foundation Website: https://www.traumaresearchfoundation.org
- Center for Action and Contemplation Website: https://cac.org
- Black Emotional Mental Health Collective (BEAM) Website: https://beam.community
- On Being Project & Civil Conversations Website: https://onbeing.org
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Website: https://www.emdria.org
- Resmaa Menakem, Somatic Abolitionism Website: https://www.resmaa.com
- Center For Engaged Compassion, Dr. Frank Rogers Jr. and Dr. Andrew Dreitcer, Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction, centerforengagedcompassion.com
- Dr. Frank Rogers Jr., Narrative, Trauma and Sacred Resistance, https://www.frankrogersjr.com
- ACT Heals Website: ACTheals.org. ACT Heals is an international, supportive healing community of Christian healthcare professionals (clergy and religious) and prayer ministers.

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